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The World's Classics

CXXXVIII

COWPER'S LETTERS

A SELECTION

WILLIAM COWPER'S LETTERS

A SELECTION

EDITED BY

E. V. LUCAS

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WILLIAM COWPER

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INTRODUCTION

In the following selection from the letters of William Cowper everything, or nearly everything, has been retained which shows him in the light of an agreeable philosophic correspondent; and nearly everything has been omitted which bears upon his own unhappy spiritual state or upon local, family, or literary matters that either are of no intrinsic interest or that involve repetition. The book, in short, has been arranged to display Cowper at his happiest: the charm and ease of his style, his domestic wit, his serene good sense, his winning playfulness. Anyone requiring a fuller representation of the man has but to turn to the complete correspondence, which is available in Bohn's Library and other editions.

As to who is the best English letter-writer, opinions naturally differ; but the claims of Cowper, whether they win or lose in the competition, have always to be weighed with the utmost consideration. One thing is certain, that no one else possessed an epistolary manner of greater distinction and fluidity, or, with the possible exception of FitzGerald, a mode of life better calculated to lead to good correspondence. For it is a mistake when a letter-writer is a man of action with too much to tell. He is then in danger of becoming exciting. The best letter-writers never excite: they entertain, amuse, interest; excite never. A humorous observer of life, of strong affections, and possessed of sufficient egotism to desire to keep his friends acquainted with his thoughts, adventures, moods, and achievements, is,

when he is without responsibilities or harassing demands on his time, in the ideal position to write such letters as become literature. Cowper at Olney, FitzGerald at Woodbridge, Gray at Cambridge, Walpole at Strawberry Hill—these fulfil the conditions absolutely: all childless; all solitaries, or at least quite happy when solitary; all amateurs; all blessed with a competency; all men of thought rather than action; all interested in themselves; and all possessed of a variety of mind which may be said never to have been in *deshabille*.

Of these, Cowper was essentially the most domesticated, for he never travelled (except once), and he alone had a constant companion, Mrs. Unwin, whereas those others lived almost completely apart from intimate friends, and indeed preferred that their friends should be divided from them—although not otherwise—by such distances as letters could bridge. Hence Cowper's letters are the most homely and personal, the least concerned with what had not come under his own observation. To have made such pretty reading out of so circumscribed a life as his, in so small a town, is no small achievement. But his letters are not only pretty reading: they place him with the masters of prose. No matter what he is telling, he is telling it with perfect clarity, while if the day chance to be one of his fortunate ones, and his correspondent congenial, he says it not only with perfect clarity but with exquisite grace too. He truly uses 'the best words in the best order.'

Whatever Cowper's place among the letter-writers may be said to be, and Southey (who wrote, however, before FitzGerald, and before Lamb's letters had been collected) said roundly that he was the first, this is certain: that he wrote a few letters that are not surpassed by any other pen. But as a matter of fact it can never be said absolutely that any one person is the best letter-writer, as it can be said, for example, that this man is the best biologist or that the best bat; because temperament plays so large a part in the letter-writer's appeal. I speak, of course, of the letters that are also literature. The best letter-writer in ordinary

life is naturally he whose news is the most acceptable; in one case it may be the lawyer who informs one of a bequest, and in another the publisher who accepts one's manuscript, and in a third the Home Secretary who indites one's reprieve.

But by the term 'the best letter-writer' we have come to mean the literary man or woman whose correspondence makes the most attractive reading; and here, of course, opinions differ, just as the writers themselves differed: one reader preferring, above all others, those letters in which he sees revealed such treasure as the odd prejudices, the tenderness, the diffidence, and warm heart of Edward FitzGerald; another, the resolute and unswerving common sense, cynicism, and humour of Dean Swift; a third, the wistful melancholy and sweet serenity of Thomas Gray; another, the rollicking absurdities and whimsical idiosyncrasy of Lamb; a fifth, the aristocratic disdain and worldly friendliness of Walpole; a sixth, the sympathetic candour, gaiety, and enthusiasm of Keats; and yet another, the comic, mischievous, quizzical, hungry soul of Jane Welsh Carlyle. I have heard each of those named the best English letter-writer; just as I have heard the palm awarded, by those in love with 'divine chit-chat,' to William Cowper.

And there it must rest. Here, as in all cases where temperament comes first, criticism resolves itself into the principle of one man one vote.

Cowper's letters, more almost than any others, illustrate the truth of the saying that it takes two to make a good letter—the writer and the recipient. He was not too fortunate in his correspondents. The time that (from our point of view) he wasted over the Reverend John Newton and Mr. Teedon is very lamentable to consider. It is true that it was to Newton that he wrote the perfect account of the visit of the candidate (on page 162), and also a rhyming letter that has never been excelled (on page 72); but for the most part that holy man's influence impelled the poet's pen to inferior exercises in the epistolary art and not a little

deplorable morbidness, while his conduct to Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, as recorded in the letter on page 280, was so gross as to make it difficult for the reader to approach with any patience any of his gentle and far too forgiving friend's later communications to him.

It is not of course possible to say of any author that he wrote all that he might have written—not even Shakespeare or Mr. Lang or the great Dumas—and especially it is so with a letter-writer. A letter-writer's industry must always be regulated largely by the number of his distant friends: the more, usually, the merrier. In the case of Cowper, who, as it was, wrote many letters and regularly, the result, admirable and engaging as it is, would perhaps have been far more admirable and engaging had he had not more friends but rather different ones. Had there been earlier in his life another Lady Hesketh and another Johnny of Norfolk in place of, say, Mrs. Cowper and the Reverend John Newton, our happiness—and his—would have been sensibly increased. For he was very dependent on his correspondent for his mood, and these two cousins touched him always to his gayest and urbanest efforts.

Cowper's letters gradually tell most of the story of his life; but something should be said here of the years before the date of the first letter, 1765, and after that of the latest, 1794. He was born in 1731 at Berkhampstead, of which place his father was rector, and he went to Westminster School, where among his schoolfellows were Charles Churchill, the satirist, and Warren Hastings. Being that unpopular thing, a shy and peculiar boy, Cowper had a painful school life, which he never afterwards forgot. He was probably always disposed to a religious cast of thought; but he tells that the circumstance of a skull thrown out by a sexton at work at St. Margaret's, Westminster, rolling and hitting him on the leg, first alarmed his conscience and convinced him of his mortality—a revelation that does not come to most boys until they are grown men. Notwithstanding his bodily frailty he excelled at cricket.

On leaving school he was articled to a solicitor, where one of his fellow-clerks was Thurlow, for whom Cowper, whose knowledge of the world was always surprising, even then predicted the Woolsack. In 1754 he was called to the Bar; and by 1757, when he was twenty-six, he had become a Commissioner of Bankrupts, and had been rejected by his cousin Theodora. He took this failure with more composure than might be expected, and continued his life at the Temple, contributing to the *Connoisseur*, which Thornton and Colman had started, consorting with Churchill, and attempting a little poetry, such as a translation of Voltaire's *Henriade*.

In 1763, however, when he was in his thirty-second year, came a great change. He was making very little money and his patrimony had nearly gone. The future seemed hopeless, and he harassed himself by the thoughts that he had neglected his studies and had wished for the death of the Clerk of the Journals to the House of Lords in order that, by his kinsman Major Cowper's influence, the reversion might be his. But when the clerk did die and the post was offered to Cowper he refused it, partly through fear of God, and partly through dread of the ordeal of a public examination; and he brooded so incessantly on his sin and his failure that he worked himself into his first mental darkening, during which he attempted more than once to take his life, and was at last placed in confinement at St. Albans. Upon his recovery his relatives found an income for him, and he was placed on June 22, 1765, in lodgings at Huntingdon. Two days later he wrote, in his thirty-fourth year, the third letter, or first letter proper, in this collection.

In a few weeks' time Cowper made some new friends, one of whom was destined to be his closest companion for the rest of his life—Mary Unwin. Her husband, the Reverend Morley Unwin, was a clergyman residing at Huntingdon, and preparing boys for the Universities; he had one son and one daughter. The letters on pages 8, 9, and 11 describe them to Lady Hesketh and to Joseph Hill. At the end of 1765, four days

before his thirty-fourth birthday, Cowper went to live with the Unwins altogether.

The letters, however, do not yet fully tell the story; for hiatuses were imminent. Very shortly after the sudden death of Mr. Unwin through a horse accident, a visit was paid to his widow by the Reverend John Newton, Curate of Olney, who brought an introduction from young Unwin at Cambridge. The meeting was fateful; for both Mrs. Unwin and Cowper, who had resolved henceforth to make their home together, fell under the spell of Newton's intensely Calvinistic nature, and agreed to settle at Olney to be near him, remaining in his house until they could find one suited to themselves. It is generally acknowledged that the society of Newton was disastrous for Cowper. The ex-captain of a Liverpool slave-ship (as Newton was), who had found grace and would get grace into everyone else, was not the fittest spiritual adviser for a sensitive, fastidious recluse like William Cowper, who wanted only happiness. Everything else he had. Newton went to work with his victim very much as a vigorous young Salvation Army officer would now deal with a prize-fighter that showed signs of repentance. Cowper, one of those persons to whom, in his own words, 'a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison,' was called upon to take his part in prayer-meetings. His life became one continual round of religious exercise. Converted slavers have little imagination, and no mercy. The result was that Cowper's morbidity increased, his mind being allowed no relaxation in its own natural courses, and between 1771 and 1776 he was again in the lowest depths, sometimes again insane and homicidal. But in 1776 a fortunate thing happened. Mr. Newton opposed the celebration of the 5th of November bonfire, and the spirited youth of Olney became so menacing that he began to think it well to leave the town. This he did in 1778, and Cowper's gradual return to serenity of mind synchronized with his departure or decision to depart.

The year 1779 may perhaps be fixed upon as the beginning of Cowper's new and best period, which lasted until 1792, when the clouds began to close in again, never really to lift. All his best letters were written between these years, the best of all, I think, in 1789-90.

In 1779 he took to gardening and drawing. In 1780, at Mrs. Unwin's suggestion, he started upon his first satire. It was in 1781 that Lady Austen came for a while into his life, and though she soon left it and occasioned some little trouble while she was there, it made a vast difference to him; for Lady Austen's wit and vivacity called to similar qualities in his own nature that had far too long slept, and she not only told him the story of John Gilpin but also set him to work upon *The Task*. *The Task* finished, he began in November 1784 his long labours on Homer, which by their exacting demands upon his mind were to be so beneficial to it as to draw down the censure of Newton, who, when Cowper and Mrs. Unwin moved to Weston Underwood to be nearer the Throckmortons, did not scruple to charge them with offences against not only God but man. The first pleasure of the remove was, however, dashed by the death of Mrs. Unwin's son, to be followed in 1787 by a return of Cowper's malady. He recovered, however, quickly, to be all ready for the golden years of 1789-92, when he sunned himself in the love and admiration of his cousin Lady Hesketh and young Johnson; was busy with Homer; had become a famous man and was surrounded by friends, including in 1792 William Hayley, of whom, however poorly we may think as a poet and a husband, we must always also think gratefully for the pleasure he brought to Weston Underwood.

I have extended the golden years to 1792 in order to make the period embrace the visit to Eartham in the summer of that year, but as a matter of strict history, although that was a happy visit, the final and gradually more tragic chapter of Cowper's life began in May, when Mrs. Unwin had her first serious paralytic stroke.

His own malady began to return soon after the Earthan visit, and by 1794 he was hopelessly buried in despondency. He aroused himself once or twice, excited thereto by the solicitude of Lady Hesketh or Johnny of Norfolk; but his doom was sealed. Mrs. Unwin died in December 1796, and Cowper in April 1800.

The foregoing is a very brief summary of Cowper's life, but it is perhaps enough to serve as a background for the letters, which, once the poet is himself, say by 1779, tell all.

A word ought perhaps to be said about Cowper's principal correspondents.

Lady Hesketh, who became his letter-writing Muse, as Lady Austen may be said to have been his poetical Muse, was the poet's cousin, a daughter of Ashley Cowper, with whom, in Southampton Street, Cowper lived when he was articled to a solicitor. She married Sir Thomas Hesketh, and was left a widow in 1778. Cowper did not resume his early affectionate intimacy with her as early as he should have done, but once he did, in 1785, he was the happier for it. Mrs. Unwin, although she resented Lady Austen's interference and influence, never had any feeling for Lady Hesketh but affection and admiration. Lady Hesketh's own letters contain some of the best descriptions of Cowper that exist. I quote from one to her sister Theodora (who was, it is suspected, the Anonymous who sent the poet and Mrs. Unwin presents) just before the move to Weston: — 'Our friend delights in a large table and a large chair. There are two of the latter comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say, that he and I always spread ourselves out on them, leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere; indeed, I am persuaded she is. Her constant employment is knitting stockings, which

she does with the finest needles I ever saw; and very nice they are,—the stockings I mean. Our cousin has not for many years worn any other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted. She sits knitting on one side of the table in her spectacles, and he on the other reading to her (when he is not employed in writing) in *his*. In winter, his morning studies are always carried on in a room by himself; but as his evenings are spent in the winter in transcribing, he usually, I find, does them *vis-à-vis* Mrs. Unwin. At this time of the year he writes always in the morning in what he calls his boudoir; this is in the garden; it has a door and a window; just holds a small table with a desk and two chairs; but though there are two chairs, and two persons *might* be contained therein, it would be with a degree of difficulty. For this cause—as I make a point of not disturbing a poet in his retreat—I go not there.'

Lady Hesketh's description of Mrs. Unwin is also invaluable in setting the poet's second mother (as he called her) before us. She writes:—'She is very far from grave; on the contrary she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words, which fall from her *de temps en temps*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety:—great indeed must it have been, not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong; but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I before said, has, in the most literal sense of those words, no will, or shadow of inclination, but what is his. Her character develops itself by degrees; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects, she does express herself with a puritanical tone, and in puritanical expressions,

from Johnny, her nephew, of Cowper's recollection of his mother, that she sent the poet the picture which inspired one of the most beautiful poems in the language.

Lastly we come to Samuel Rose, who was the son of a schoolmaster at Chiswick. He was only twenty when he went, a devout pilgrim, to Olney to see the poet. One of Rose's letters written during his visit to Weston in 1788 gives another excellent account of Cowper at home :—'I came here on Thursday ; and here I found Lady Hesketh, a very agreeable, good-tempered, sensible woman, polite without ceremony, and sufficiently well-bred to make others happy in her company. I here feel no restraint, and none is wished to be inspired. The "noiseless tenor" of our lives would much please and gratify you. An account of one day will furnish you with a tolerably accurate idea of the manner in which all our time is passed. We rise at whatever hour we choose ; breakfast at half after nine, take about an hour to satisfy *sentiment*, not the *appetite*, —for we talk—"good heavens, how we talk!" and enjoy ourselves most wonderfully. Then we separate, and dispose of ourselves as our different inclinations point. Mr. Cowper to Homer. Mr. R. to transcribing what is already translated. Lady Hesketh to work, and to books alternately ; and Mrs. Unwin, who in everything but her face, is like a kind angel sent from heaven to guard the health of our poet, is busy in domestic concerns. At one, our labours finished, the poet and I walk for two hours. I then drink most plentiful draughts of instruction which flow from his lips, instruction so sweet, and goodness so exquisite, that one *loves* it for its flavour. At three we return and dress, and the succeeding hour brings dinner upon the table, and collects again the smiling countenances of the family to partake of the neat and elegant meal. Conversation continues till tea-time, when an entertaining volume engrosses our thoughts till the last meal is announced. Conversation again, and then rest before twelve, to enable us to rise again to the same round of

innocent, virtuous pleasure. Can you wonder that I should feel melancholy at the thought of leaving such a family; or rather, will you not be surprised at my resolution to depart from this quiet scene on Thursday next?'

E. V. L.

P.S.—The motto on the title-page, I ought perhaps to say, bore originally not upon Cowper's letters but his poetry. Lamb's letter was written in 1796, while Cowper was still living, and before any of his correspondence had been published. Coleridge, who first used the admirable phrase 'divine chit-chat,' applied it, I imagine, to *The Task*.

CONTENTS

WITH ABSTRACT OF SUBJECTS

LETTER		PAGE
1.	To Clotworthy Rowley. Philosophical reflections on the world and poverty	1
2.	To Lady Hesketh. Self-deprecatory	2
3.	To Joseph Hill. Settlement at Huntingdon	4
4.	To Joseph Hill. Housekeeping details	5
5.	To Joseph Hill. Finance and horsemanship	7
6.	To Lady Hesketh. Huntingdon oddities	8
7.	To Lady Hesketh. Account of the Unwins	8
8.	To Joseph Hill. Account of the Unwins	11
9.	To Mrs. Cowper. Daily routine with the Unwins	12
10.	To Mrs. Cowper. On taking to gardening	13
11.	To Joseph Hill. Finance and gardening	13
12.	To Joseph Hill. Election news	14
13.	To Mrs. Cowper. Death of Mr. Unwin	15
14.	To Joseph Hill. First letter from Olney	15
15.	To Joseph Hill. Venison	16
16.	To Joseph Hill. Thoughts of commencing tutor	16
17.	To Joseph Hill. Gardening	17
18.	To Joseph Hill. Finance and fish	18
19.	To Joseph Hill. Fish	19
20.	To Joseph Hill. Gray's Works	19
21.	To Joseph Hill. Gray's Works	19
22.	To Joseph Hill. Cook's Voyages	20

LETTER PAGE
23. To Joseph Hill. A melon 20
24. To Joseph Hill. Abbé Raynal . . . 21
25. To the Rev. William Unwin. Rhyming as a pastime 22
26. To the Rev. William Unwin. A lion at Olney 23
27. To the Rev. William Unwin. Gardening . 23
28. To the Rev. William Unwin. Gardening and poetry 24
29. To the Rev. William Unwin. Recollections of Margate—Sam Cox's wonder . . 26
30. To the Rev. William Unwin. Bathing and Margate—Mr. Twopenny . . 27
31. To the Rev. William Unwin. Glazing and pigeons—A visit to Gayhurst . . 29
32. To Joseph Hill. Fish 30
33. To the Rev. William Unwin. Dr. Johnson and Milton 31
34. To Joseph Hill. His mind . . . 32
35. To the Rev. William Unwin. Small philosophy 32
36. To the Rev. William Unwin. Men of talent and men of genius—His state of indecision—Polygamy 34
37. To the Rev. William Unwin. Amusements for a recluse 36
38. To the Rev. John Newton. Description of a visitor 36
39. To the Rev. John Newton. Drawing and small philosophy 37
40. To the Rev. William Unwin. Short-lived hobbies and expectation of visit . . 39
41. To the Rev. John Newton. Chaff of Bentley 40

LETTER PAGE

42. To Mrs. Newton. Tom Freeman's misadventure 41
43. To the Rev. William Unwin. Pope's letters —'Sweet stream! that winds through yonder glade' 42
44. To the Rev. William Unwin. An Olney jury 44
45. To the Rev. John Newton. A riddle . 45
46. To the Rev. William Unwin. Taciturnity and letter-writing—Our forefathers . 46
47. To the Rev. John Newton. The escape of Puss 47
48. To Mrs. Cowper. Time 49
49. To the Rev. William Unwin. The Biographer—Verses on minor worthies . 50
50. To the Rev. William Unwin. The education of a boy 51
51. To Mrs. Newton. The sea 53
52. To the Rev. William Unwin. Concerning copies of verses 54
53. To the Rev. William Unwin. Law cases rhymed 54
54. To the Rev. William Unwin. Wigs and hair 56
55. To the Rev. John Newton. *Table Talk* and autobiographical 56
56. To Mrs. Hill. Letter-writing to ladies—Thanks for presents 58
57. To the Rev. William Unwin. Vestris, with epigram 59
58. To the Rev. John Newton. Motives for publishing 61
59. To the Rev. William Unwin. Daily routine —Conduct 61
60. To the Rev. William Unwin. His forthcoming volume of *Poems* 63

LETTER PAGE
61. To Joseph Hill. His forthcoming volume of *Poems* and his attitude to the public . 65
62. To the Rev. William Unwin. Postponement of book—Vincent Bourne . . 66
63. To the Rev. William Unwin. Horsemanship 68
64. To the Rev. William Unwin. Mrs. Unwin—The drought 68
65. To the Rev. William Unwin. Bashfulness and hunger—Story of Garrick . . 70
66. To the Rev. John Newton. His portrait . 71
67. To the Rev. John Newton. A letter in rhyme 72
68. To the Rev. John Newton. The picnic . 74
69. To the Rev. William Unwin. Litigation and Christianity—The picnic . . . 75
70. To Mrs. Newton. Fashion's tyranny . . 77
71. To the Rev. John Newton. The hot summer—Folly of exchanging lots in life 78
72. To the Rev. John Newton. News of Lady Austen's near approach—Verses on the price of fish 80
73. To Mrs. Newton. Letter in verse on oysters 81
74. To the Rev. John Newton. On giving Dr. Johnson a copy of the *Poems*—Smoking . 82
75. To the Rev. William Unwin. The sea—Lady Austen 84
76. To the Rev. William Unwin. Holidays—'Retirement' 85
77. To the Rev. John Newton. Poets and unpunctuality 87
78. To Mrs. Cowper. On his motives as a poet 88
79. To the Rev. William Unwin. The ghost story—Thoughts on authorship . . 89

LETTER PAGE
80. To the Rev. William Unwin. Letter-writing —Human gregariousness . . . 92
81. To the Rev. William Unwin. Large families 94
82. To the Rev. John Newton. The odd visitor 94
83. To Joseph Hill. Appeal for books . . 95
84. To Joseph Hill. The American war . . 95
85. To the Rev. John Newton. Olney news . 97
86. To the Rev. John Newton. England and America—A bore 98
87. To the Rev. William Unwin. Johnson, Pope, Dryden, and Prior . . . 99
88. To the Rev. John Newton. The government 101
89. To the Rev. William Unwin. Criticism—Reading for a small boy 102
90. To Joseph Hill. His patriotism and want of it 105
91. To the Rev. John Newton. Death of George Mayne 106
92. To the Rev. William Unwin. Historians—The breach with Lady Austen . . 107
93. To the Rev. William Unwin. Lady Austen again 109
94. To the Rev. William Unwin. Lady Austen again—Sunday routs 110
95. To the Rev. William Bull. Overtures of friendship 112
96. To the Rev. William Unwin. Little John . 113
97. To the Rev. William Unwin. Soldiers at Olney—Parentheses 113
98. To the Rev. William Unwin. Benjamin Franklin—Captain Cook . . . 115
99. To the Rev. William Unwin. Desires for praise . . . 117

LETTER PAGE
100. To the Rev. William Unwin. Lady Austen 118
101. To the Rev. William Unwin. Lady Austen 118
102. To the Rev. William Unwin. The snake and the kittens—Madame Guyon . . 119
103. To Lady Austen. A rhymed address—The flood at Olney 121
104. To the Rev. William Unwin. Burglars at Olney—Christians 122
105. To the Rev. William Unwin. *John Gilpin* . 125
106. To Joseph Hill. Planting trees . . . 126
107. To the Rev. William Unwin. Innocent laughter 126
108. To Mrs. Newton. Inscrutable ways of Providence 127
109. To the Rev. William Unwin. Literary profits 129
110. To Joseph Hill. Contrast between Hill's evenings and Cowper's 129
111. To the Rev. William Unwin. Simple amusements of the poet 131
112. To the Rev. John Newton. England and America 131
113. To Joseph Hill. February and May . . 133
114. To the Rev. William Unwin. Cure for squinting, etc. 133
115. To the Rev. John Newton. Letter-writing 134
116. To the Rev. William Bull. Tobacco, etc. . 134
117. To the Rev. William Unwin. The weather —Mr. Bull 135
118. To the Rev. William Bull. Journeys . 136
119. To the Rev. John Newton. Retirement and local attachment 137
120. To the Rev. William Bull. Thunderstorms. 139
121. To the Rev. William Unwin. Ballads and ballad-writers—The goldfinches . . 139

LETTER PAGE
122. To the Rev. John Newton. Mr. Bull's smoking habit 141
123. To Joseph Hill. The approach of winter . 142
124. To the Rev. John Newton. A fire . . 143
125. To the Rev. William Unwin. Joy of open air—The fire 145
126. To the Rev. John Newton. The fire—A dream 146
127. To the Rev. William Unwin. Josephus . 148
128. To the Rev. William Unwin. Balloons—The Throckmortons 149
129. To the Rev. John Newton. The Antediluvians 152
130. To the Rev. John Newton. Balloons. . 154
131. To the Rev. John Newton. The Picts—A dream of Adam 156
132. To the Rev. John Newton. The solace of verse-making 158
133. To the Rev. William Unwin. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* 160
134. To the Rev. John Newton. A visit from the candidate 162
135. To the Rev. William Unwin. Beattie and Blair—The beginnings of speech . . 164
136. To the Rev. John Newton. The election battle 166
137. To the Rev. William Unwin. The use of cosmetics 167
138. To the Rev. William Unwin. The candle tax 170
139. To the Rev. John Newton. Mythology and sceptics—Horace and Juvenal . . 173
140. To the Rev. John Newton. Lymington . 174
141. To the Rev. William Unwin. The Throckmortons 175

LETTER PAGE
142. To the Rev. John Newton. Inland pleasures —South Sea Islands 176
143. To the Rev. John Newton. Countryside noises 177
144. To the Rev. William Unwin. Small news . 179
145. To the Rev. William Unwin. *The Task* . 180
146. To the Rev. William Unwin. *John Gilpin* —Charles the First 182
147. To the Rev. John Newton. The Romans and the Sandwich Islanders—Knox's Essays . 183
148. To the Rev. William Unwin. *John Gilpin* . 185
149. To Joseph Hill. The death of old Mrs. Hill 186
150. To the Rev. William Unwin. *Tirocinium* —A dialogue on music 187
151. To the Rev. William Unwin. Odd aids to verse 188
152. To Joseph Hill. Balloons 189
153. To the Rev. John Newton. Blank verse— Homely titles 190
154. To the Rev. John Newton. Epitaph on Dr. Johnson 191
155. To the Rev. William Unwin. Letter writing 192
156. To the Rev. William Unwin. Mr. Teedon's realized ambition 193
157. To the Rev. John Newton. Account of Mr. Teedon—A drunkard 195
158. To the Rev. John Newton. The new card-table 196
159. To the Rev. John Newton. Popularity of *John Gilpin* 198
160. To the Rev. William Unwin. Bensley and retirement 200
161. To the Rev. John Newton. An impostor . 201
162. To Master John Unwin. Greek . . 202

LETTER PAGE
163. To Joseph Hill. His boudoir . . . 203
164. To the Rev. John Newton. The spinney . 203
165. To the Rev. William Unwin. A thunder-storm—Picture of Christ . . . 204
166. To the Rev. John Newton. Southampton water—Mr. Perry's recovery . . . 206
167. To Lady Hesketh. Recollections of childhood and of her husband—Family matters 207
168. To the Rev. John Newton. Death of a child 210
169. To the Rev. William Unwin. Little John's reading 211
170. To the Rev. John Newton. Homer and Virgil—The fifth of November . 211
171. To Lady Hesketh. Affection and finances 213
172. To Lady Hesketh. Beginning of translation of Homer 215
173. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. A bishop's charge 216
174. To Lady Hesketh. Wine—Old memories—The King 217
175. To Lady Hesketh. Presents—Orpington fowls 219
176. To the Rev. John Newton. The translation of Homer—Pope 221
177. To Lady Hesketh. His desk—Commons—Old memories 223
178. To Lady Hesketh. His old desk—His new desk 225
179. To the Rev. John Newton. Pope's Homer 226
180. To Lady Hesketh. His new desk—Pope's Homer 227
181. To the Rev. William Unwin. His new desk 231
182. To George Colman. Translation of Homer 231
183. To the Rev. William Unwin. Bedding for Olney poor 233

LETTER PAGE
184. To the Rev. William Unwin. Lady Hesketh 233
185. To Lady Hesketh. Autobiographical—Lady Austen—An article on him in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 234
186. To Lady Hesketh. A gift from 'Anonymous' 238
187. To Lady Hesketh. Preparations for her visit 239
188. To Lady Hesketh. Lord Thurlow . . 240
189. To Lady Hesketh. Her approaching visit—Pope and Homer 241
190. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Condolences . 243
191. To Lady Hesketh. A dream . . . 244
192. To Lady Hesketh. House-hunting . . 245
193. To Lady Hesketh. Her approaching visit . 247
194. To Lady Hesketh. Her approaching visit—House-hunting 248
195. To Lady Hesketh. Her approaching visit—Her lodging 251
196. To Lady Hesketh. Her approaching visit—The Cowpers 253
197. To Lady Hesketh. Her approaching visit—The beauties of Olney 255
198. To Lady Hesketh. The Throckmortons . 258
199. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. The translation of the *Iliad* 259
200. To Lady Hesketh. Flowers now blooming . 261
201. To Lady Hesketh. Old times—Dinner at the Throckmortons' 262
202. To Joseph Hill. A triple epithet . . 264
203. To Lady Hesketh. A postponement of her coming—Cowper's disappointment—A boy's ode 264
204. To Joseph Hill. Lady Hesketh's arrival—Plans for moving 268

LETTER PAGE
205. To the Rev. William Unwin. Lady Hesketh's arrival—Plans for moving—Little John's studies 269
206. To the Rev. William Unwin. (A mere note) 271
207. To the Rev. William Unwin. Mr. Unwin's prospects as a tutor—The translation—The Throckmortons 272
208. To the Rev. William Unwin. His philosophy 273
209. To the Rev. William Unwin. A poet's whims 274
210. To the Rev. William Unwin. Letter-writing—Poetry and seclusion 275
211. To the Rev. William Unwin. Charles Churchill 277
212. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Milton's verse—The move to Weston 279
213. To the Rev. William Unwin. Newton's vile insinuations 280
214. To the Rev. John Newton. Cowper on his defence 282
215. To Joseph Hill. Drowning of ninth book of the translation 284
216. To the Rev. John Newton. Cowper on his defence again 285
217. To Lady Hesketh. His birthday—The Throckmortons—Life at Weston . . 287
218. To Lady Hesketh. Death of the Rev. W. C. Unwin 289
219. To Joseph Hill. The new house . . 290
220. To Lady Hesketh. Local news . . . 291
221. To Lady Hesketh. The prize at the Throckmortons' 293
222. To Lady Hesketh. Personal news . . 294
223. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Homer and Cowper's recognition 296

LETTER PAGE
224. To Lady Hesketh. Homer interrupted—Poor health 298
225. To Samuel Rose. The poet's illness . . 300
226. To Samuel Rose. Convalescence . . 300
227. To Lady Hesketh. Convalescence—The Throckmortons 302
228. To Lady Hesketh. Small news . . . 303
229. To Lady Hesketh. The Throckmortons . 304
230. To Lady Hesketh. Miss Jekyll . . 305
231. To Lady Hesketh. The poet's uncle . . 306
232. To Samuel Rose. Exercise—Cowper's early haunts 307
233. To Lady Hesketh. Homer—The Throckmortons 308
234. To Lady Hesketh. Plans for her visit . 309
235. To Lady Hesketh. A kitten . . . 311
236. To Lady Hesketh. A visit from a parish clerk 312
237. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Bishop Bagot . 314
238. To Lady Hesketh—The Throckmortons' ball 315
239. To Lady Hesketh. Presents—Toothache and extractions—Small news . . 316
240. To Lady Hesketh. Another extraction—Mrs. Unwin's accident 318
241. To Lady Hesketh. Bunbury's satirical picture 320
242. To Lady Hesketh. Mr. Greatheed . . 321
243. To Lady Hesketh. A practical joke—Adventures of C—— 322
244. To Clotworthy Rowley. Autobiographical—Homer 325
245. To Lady Hesketh. A hunt . . . 327
246. To Mrs. King. Autobiographical . . 329

LETTER PAGE
247. To Lady Hesketh. The Throckmortons . 330
248. To Mrs. Hill. Small news . . . 331
249. To Samuel Rose. Admirers—A ballad of emancipation 332
250. To the Rev. John Newton. Adventures of Mr. Bean and Mr. Bull 333
251. To Lady Hesketh. Smollett's *Don Quixote* —Inkle-weavers 334
252. To Joseph Hill. Books 335
253. To Lady Hesketh—Ladies' letters—A long walk 336
254. To Lady Hesketh. Newspapers and magazines—*The Gentleman's Magazine* . . 337
255. To Joseph Hill. Print of Crazy Kate, etc. —Homer 339
256. To Lady Hesketh. East wind. Fowle . 340
257. To Lady Hesketh. Ashley Cowper's death. 341
258. To Mrs. King. Evolution of manners . 342
259. To Lady Hesketh. Beau's adventure . 344
260. To Lady Hesketh. Beau 345
261. To Joseph Hill. A note 345
262. To Lady Hesketh. The lime walk—Fame . 346
263. To Lady Hesketh. Samuel Rose—A clock motto 347
264. To Samuel Rose. Weston news . . 348
265. To Mrs. King. Speculations as to her appearance 350
266. To Lady Hesketh. Expectations of her visit —Yardley oak 351
267. To Samuel Rose. Weston news . . 352
268. To Mrs. King. A present 353
269. To Mrs. King. His pursuits . . . 354
270. To Samuel Rose. Vincent Bourne . . 356
271. To Mrs. King. His habits 356

LETTER PAGE
272. To Samuel Rose. Reading and walking . 358
273. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Homer . . 358
274. To Lady Hesketh. Weston news—A signet ring 359
275. To Lady Hesketh. Weston news . . 360
276. To Lady Hesketh. Letter-writing . . 361
277. To Samuel Rose. Homer—Hawkins Browne and plagiarism 361
278. To Lady Hesketh. The vacant laureateship 362
279. To Samuel Rose. A cuckoo clock—Dr. Johnson 362
280. To Lady Hesketh. Egotism . . . 363
281. To Lady Hesketh. Weston news . . 364
282. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. His tractability 365
283. To Samuel Rose. The cuckoo clock . . 365
284. To Mrs. Throckmorton. Weston news . 365
285. To Mrs. King. Homer a hard task-master —Paintings 366
286. To Samuel Rose. Critics and mercy . . 367
287. To Joseph Hill. Hymn-writing to order . 368
288. To the Rev. John Newton. A resumed intercourse—Homer 369
289. To Samuel Rose. A parody of Homer . 370
290. To Lady Hesketh. A letter from Beau . 371
291. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Homer . 371
292. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Homer . . 372
293. To Mrs. King. Long silence in correspondence 374
294. To Lady Hesketh. Johnny Johnson's poem 375
295. To Lady Hesketh. Johnny Johnson—Weston news 376
296. To the Rev. John Newton. Dread of January 377
297. To Lady Hesketh. Mrs. Bodham — His mother's picture 379

LETTER PAGE
298. To Mrs. Bodham. His mother's picture—Old memories 379
299. To John Johnson. Mrs. Bodham—An invitation to Norfolk 382
300. To Samuel Rose. Candour 383
301. To Mrs. King. His mother's picture . 384
302. To Mrs. Throckmorton. Weston—His periwig 385
303. To Lady Hesketh. Homer in English . 385
304. To John Johnson. The Odyssey—Advice to a young man 387
305. To John Johnson. More advice—Lavater—Greek *v.* Mathematics. 388
306. To Lady Hesketh. Homer 389
307. To Lady Hesketh. Fish 390
308. To Joseph Hill. Homer 391
309. To Mrs. Throckmorton. Weston news—Savage dogs 391
310. To Lady Hesketh. A would-be laureate . 392
311. To Lady Hesketh. Her charity. . . . 393
312. To Samuel Rose. Good counsel—A riddle. 393
313. To Mrs. King. Methods of writing . . 394
314. To Lady Hesketh. Apostrophe to an old woman 395
315. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Homer—The clergy 396
316. To Mrs. Bodham. Friendly greetings . 397
317. To Lady Hesketh. The French . . 398
318. To John Johnson. Good counsel . . 399
319. To John Johnson. Good counsel . . 400
320. To the Rev. William Bull. (A mere note). 401
321. To Mrs. Bodham. Praise of Johnny Johnson. 401
322. To Joseph Hill. The battle of booksellers. 402

LETTER PAGE
323. To Mrs. Bodham. Old memories . . 403
324. To John Johnson. Dowager Lady Spencer 404
325. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. News of Homer, etc.—The laureateship 404
326. To John Johnson. Cambridge appreciating Homer 406
327. To Mr. Walter Churchey. Almsgiving . 406
328. To Mrs. King. Weston news . . . 407
329. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Quantity in verse 408
330. To Mr. Johnson. Poetic licence . . 408
331. To John Johnson. His correspondent's character 409
332. To Clotworthy Rowley. Homer, etc. . 410
333. To Samuel Rose. Accident to Pope's Homer 411
334. To Lady Hesketh. The poet's fame . . 411
335. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Homer—Blank verse 412
336. To John Johnson. Homer . . . 413
337. To Joseph Hill. Homer 414
338. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Poets and poetry 414
339. To Samuel Rose. The price of his translation 415
340. To Lady Hesketh. Horace Walpole's silence—A midnight scare 415
341. To Mrs. Throckmorton. Mr. Throckmorton's pamphlet 416
342. To the Rev. Mr. Hurdis. Pets and women 417
343. To Lady Hesketh. Weston news—Johnny Johnson 418
344. To the Rev. John Newton. Consolation . 419
345. To Lady Hesketh. A turnpike—A new hat 420

LETTER PAGE
346. To Mrs. Bodham. Personal news . . 421
347. To Lady Hesketh. Publishing difficulties . 423
348. To the Rev. William Bull. Various sects . 424
349. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Lady Bagot and shyness 425
350. To the Rev. Mr. Hurdis. His popularity . 426
351. To Lady Hesketh. Homer—Thurlow . 427
352. To Clotworthy Rowley. Milton . . . 429
353. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Chester Bagot —Lord Bagot's poetry—Milton . . 430
354. To the Rev. John Newton. Hannah More 431
355. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Parsons . . 432
356. To Samuel Rose. Mrs. Unwin's illness . 433
357. To the Rev. John Newton. Mrs. Unwin's illness 433
358-62. Letters between Cowper and Lord Thurlow on translating Homer . 434-40
363. To Thomas Park. Editing Milton . . 440
364. To the Rev. John Newton. On a trifling poem 441
365. To Mrs. King. An epigram . . . 443
366. To Thomas Park. Autobiographical . . 443
367. To John Johnson. Family news . . 445
368. To the Rev. John Newton. William Pearce 446
369. To Lady Hesketh. First news of Hayley . 447
370. To William Hayley. An invitation—Autobiographical 448
371. To Joseph Hill. Money—Homer—Milton. 449
372. To Lady Throckmorton. A Plagiarist—Emancipation 451
373. To Lady Hesketh. Warren Hastings . 452
374. To Lady Hesketh. Mrs. Unwin's new seizure 453

LETTER PAGE
375. To Lady Hesketh. Mrs. Unwin's new seizure 453
376. To William Hayley. Mrs. Unwin's new seizure 454
377. To William Hayley. Mrs. Unwin's new seizure 455
378. To William Hayley. Mrs. Unwin's new seizure 455
379. To the Rev. Thomas Carwardine. Thurlow 456
380. To Mr. Johnson. Preoccupation . . 458
381. To William Hayley. Mrs. Unwin—Abbot's portrait 459
382. To Thomas Park. Drawing . . . 460
383. Lady Hesketh. Abbot's portrait—The visit to Eartham 461
384. To William Hayley. Abbot's portrait—The visit to Eartham 462
385. To the Rev. William Bull. Abbot's portrait —The visit to Eartham 463
386. To William Hayley. Nocturnal fears—Anticipations of Eartham . . . 465
387. To Samuel Teedon. The journey to Eartham 466
388. To the Rev. Mr. Greatheed. The journey to Eartham 467
389. To Mrs. Courtenay. The journey to Eartham 468
390. To the Rev. John Newton. Romney's portrait 470
391. To Mrs. Courtenay. Epitaph on Fop—Eartham 470
392. To Lady Hesketh. Eartham . . . 471
393. To Lady Hesketh. Eartham . . . 473
394. To William Hayley. The return journey . 473

LETTER PAGE
395. To William Hayley. The return journey . 474
396. To William Hayley. Home again . . 475
397. To William Hayley. Low spirits . . 476
398. To Samuel Rose. The edition of Milton . 477
399. To William Hayley. Official dirge-writer . 479
400. To Lady Hesketh. Home news—The French 479
401. To Joseph Hill. Politics 481
402. To Lady Hesketh. Family news—Money . 482
403. To William Hayley. Portrait of Hayley . 484
404. To John Johnson. A gift of pheasants . 484
405. To Lady Hesketh. Mr. and Mrs. Rose . 485
406. To William Hayley. A dream of Milton . 486
407, 408. Correspondence between Master Hayley and William Cowper on blemishes in Cowper's works detected by Master Hayley 487-489
409. To Joseph Hill. Finance — Home — The canal 489
410. To John Johnson. On taking orders . 490
411. To the Rev. John Newton. Correspondence 491
412. To the Rev. Walter Bagot. Consolation . 491
413. To Lady Hesketh. Tories and Whigs . 492
414. To Thomas Park. Homer—Mrs. Unwin . 492
415. To William Hayley. Routine . . . 494
416. To Lady Hesketh. Johnny and the rain . 495
417. To William Hayley. Building a summer-house 495
418. To Thomas Park. Chapman's Homer . 496
419. To William Hayley. Homer—The builder 497
420. To Mrs. Charlotte Smith. Thanks for a dedication 498
421. To John Johnson. Clergymen . . . 499
422. To William Hayley. Building—Flaxman . 500
423. To Mrs. Courtenay. Bob Archer's party . 501

LETTER		PAGE
424.	To Lady Hesketh. Her proposed visit .	502
425.	To John Johnson. The sun-dial . .	503
426.	To John Johnson. His approaching visit .	504
427.	To Mrs. Courtenay. Home news . .	505
428.	To Samuel Rose. Homer	506
429.	To Samuel Rose. 'Jonathan Wild' . .	507
430.	To William Hayley. Homer and Thurlow	508
431.	To William Hayley. Homer and Thurlow	509

SELECTIONS FROM THE LETTERS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.

To Clotworthy Rowley, Esq.

Sept. 2, 1762.

Dear Rowley—Your letter has taken me just in the crisis; to-morrow I set off for Brighthelmston, and there I stay till the winter brings us all to town again. This world is a shabby fellow, and uses us ill; but a few years hence there will be no difference between us and our fathers of the tenth generation upwards. I could be as splenetic as you, and with more reason, if I thought proper to indulge that humour; but my resolution is (and I would advise you to adopt it), never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be; but in the meantime *Io Triumphe*! If a great man struggling with misfortunes is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savours pretty much of the ancient Stoic; but till the Stoics became coxcombs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.

If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong

as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with all its appurtenances; for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice, and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by anything but his natural temper? And yet we blame each other's conduct as freely as if that temper was the most tractable beast in the world, and we had nothing to do but to twitch the rein to the right or the left, and go just as we are directed by others! All this is nonsense, and nothing better.

There are some sensible folks, who having great estates have wisdom enough too to spend them properly; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps, as knowing how to shift without 'em. Between these two degrees are they who spend their money dirtily, or get it so. If you ask me where they are to be placed who amass much wealth in an honest way, you must be so good as to find them first, and then I'll answer the question. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it; that degree of it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it: but here it is, such as it is, and much good may you do with it. I have no estate as it happens, so if it should fall into bad hands, I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy. Adieu! Carr is well, and gives his love to you.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

To Lady Hesketh

The Temple, Aug. 9, 1763.

My dear Cousin—Having promised to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals, and my nights in dreaming of them. An employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numskull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion, I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution,—a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author who has a spark of love for his country. O! my good cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world, as I am unfit for this,—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity!—I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, cousin? I know what you expect, but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, cousin, there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed, and riveted fast upon me; and,

between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear cousin! So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you. Thank Heaven that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which in that case I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.—Yours ever, and evermore, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Huntingdon, June 24, 1765.

Dear Joe—The only recompense I can make you for your kind attention to my affairs during my illness, is to tell you, that by the mercy of God I am restored to perfect health both of mind and body. This I believe will give you pleasure; and I would gladly do anything from which you could receive it.

I left St. Albans on the seventeenth, and arrived that day at Cambridge, spent some time there with my brother, and came hither on the twenty-second. I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions; we have had many worse, and except the size of it (which however is sufficient for a single man), but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Albans, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says, he kept no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine, because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them; but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

The river Ouse (I forget how they spell it), is the most agreeable circumstance in this part of the world; at this town it is I believe as wide as the Thames at Windsor; nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor has it more flowers upon its banks,

these being attributes which in strict truth belong to neither. Fluellen would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both. It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning.

I beg you will remember me to all my friends, which is a task will cost you no great pains to execute: particularly remember me to those of your own house, and believe me your very affectionate W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Huntingdon, July 3, 1765.

Dear Joe—Whatever you may think of the matter, it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live upon sheep's heads, and liver and lights, like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat, in so small a family, is an endless encumbrance. My butcher's bill for last week amounted to four shillings and tenpence. I set off with a leg of lamb, and was forced to give part of it away to my washerwoman. Then I made an experiment upon a sheep's heart, and that was too little. Next I put three pounds of beef into a pie, and this had like to have been too much, for it lasted three days, though my landlord was admitted to a share in it. Then as to small beer, I am puzzled to pieces about it. I have bought as much for a shilling, as will serve us at least a month, and it is grown sour already. In short, I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity.

I have received but one visit since here I came. I don't mean that I have refused any, but that only one has been offered. This was from my woollen-draper; a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponsible man, and extremely civil. He has a cold bath, and has promised me a key of it, which I shall probably make use of in

the winter. He has undertaken, too, to get me the St. James's Chronicle three times a-week, and to show me Hinchinbrook House, and to do every service for me in his power; so that I did not exceed the truth, you see, when I spoke of his civility. Here is a card-assembly, and a dancing-assembly, and a horse-race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions; especially as I shall go to 'em just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor; and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places, I shall not come within the description of a spectator; and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition.

You are an old dog at a bad tenant; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if once you begin with him. Poor toad! I leave him entirely to your mercy.

My dear Joe, you desire me to write long letters—I have neither matter enough, nor perseverance enough for the purpose. However, if you can but contrive to be tired of reading as soon as I am tired of writing, we shall find that short ones answer just as well; and, in my opinion, this is a very practicable measure.

My friend Colman has had good fortune; I wish him better fortune still; which is, that he may make a right use of it. The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of society, it is their own fault.

I was debtor to Bensley seven pounds, or nine, I forget which. If you can find out his brother, you will do me a great favour, if you will pay him for me; but do it at your leisure.—Yours and theirs, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

August 14, 1765.

Dear Joe—Both Lady Hesketh and my brother had apprised me of your intention to give me a call; and herein I find they were both mistaken. But they both informed me, likewise, that you were already set out for Warwickshire; in consequence of which latter intelligence, I have lived in continual expectation of seeing you, any time this fortnight. Now how these two ingenious personages (for such they are both) should mistake an expedition to French Flanders for a journey to Warwickshire, is more than I, with all my ingenuity, can imagine. I am glad, however, that I have still a chance of seeing you, and shall treasure it up amongst my agreeable expectations. In the meantime you are welcome to the British shore, as the song has it, and I thank you for your epitome of your travels. You don't tell me how you escaped the vigilance of the custom-house officers, though I dare-say you were knuckle-deep in contrabands, and had your boots stuffed with all and all manner of unlawful wares and merchandizes.

You know, Joe, I am very deep in debt to my little physician at St. Albans, and that the handsomest thing I can do will be to pay him *le plutôt qu'il sera possible* (this is vile French, I believe, but you can now correct it). My brother informs me that you have such a quantity of cash in your hands, on my account, that I may venture to send him forty pounds immediately. This, therefore, I shall be obliged if you will manage for me; and when you receive the hundred pounds, which my brother likewise brags you are shortly to receive, I shall be glad if you will discharge the remainder of that debt without waiting for any further advice from your humble servant.

I am become a professed horseman, and do hereby assume to myself the style and title of the Knight of the Bloody Spur. It has cost me much to bring this

point to bear; but I think I have at last accomplished it. My love to all your family.—Yours ever,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Huntingdon, Sept. 14, 1765.

My dear Cousin—The longer I live here, the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it. I am upon very good terms with no less than five families, besides two or three odd scrambling fellows like myself. The last acquaintance I made here is with the race of the Unwins, consisting of father and mother, son and daughter, the most comfortable social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-one years of age, one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life, when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets everything but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently he is known almost as soon as seen, and having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the perusal even of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design, however, is quite his own, proceeding merely from his being and having always been sincere in his belief and love of the Gospel. Another acquaintance I have lately made is with a Mr. Nicholson, a North country divine, very poor, but very good, and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all the year round; and travels on foot to serve two churches every Sunday through the year, his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. ——, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh; partly (I believe) from a religious scruple (for he is very

religious), and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life, at about six o'clock, at a FOUNTAIN of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity, for he is the most perfect time-piece in the world. I have received a visit likewise from Mr. ——. He is very much a gentleman, well read, and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had the choice of all England, where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well. . . .

To Lady Hesketh

Huntingdon, Oct. 18, 1765.

I wish you joy, my dear Cousin, of being safely arrived in port from the storms of Southampton. For my own part, who am but as a Thames wherry, in a world full of tempest and commotion, I know so well the value of the creek I have put into, and the snugness it affords me, that I have a sensible sympathy with you in the pleasure you find in being once more blown to Droxford. I know enough of Miss Morley to send her my compliments; to which, if I had never seen her, her affection for you would sufficiently entitle her. If I neglected to do it sooner, it is only because I am naturally apt to neglect what I ought to do; and if I was as genteel as I am negligent, I should be the most delightful creature in the universe.

I am glad you think so favourably of my Huntingdon acquaintance; they are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin, if I had had materials for a minute description. She is about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little; not because her mother

requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality between all the parts of the family; and the mother and daughter seem to dote upon each other. The first time I went to the house I was introduced to the daughter alone; and sat with her near half an hour, before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-á-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on: accordingly she talked a great deal, and extremely well; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease of address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen. They are altogether the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive.

Since I wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should; but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request before I left St. Albans, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe, with a steadfast assurance, that our petitions are heard even while we are making them; and how delightful to meet with a proof of it in the effectual and actual grant of them! . . . My love to all who inquire after me.—Yours affectionately, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Oct. 25, 1765.

Dear Joe—I am afraid the month of October has proved rather unfavourable to the *belle assemblée* at Southampton; high winds and continual rains being bitter enemies to that agreeable lounge, which you and I are equally fond of. I have very cordially betaken myself to my books, and my fireside; and seldom leave them unless for exercise. I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and I am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse instead of it as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the

limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have been always apt to do), we are guilty of a very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with. You remember Mr. Gray's stanza—

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
> The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Yours, dear Joe, W. C.

To Mrs. Cowper

Huntingdon, Oct. 20, 1766.

My dear Cousin— . . . I am obliged to you for the interest you take in my welfare, and for your inquiring so particularly after the manner in which my time passes here. As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none; the place indeed swarms with them, and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits adjourn to the garden, where with Mrs. Unwin and her son I have generally the pleasure of religious

conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon; and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. . . .—Yours ever, my dear Cousin,

W. C.

To Mrs. Cowper

March 14, 1767.

My dear Cousin— . . . I am become a great florist, and shrub-doctor. If the Major can make up a small packet of seeds, that will make a figure in a garden, where we have little else besides jessamine and honeysuckle; such a packet I mean as may be put in one's fob, I will promise to take great care of them, as I ought to value natives of the Park. They must not be such however as require great skill in the management, for at present I have no skill to spare. . . .

W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

May 14, 1767.

Dear Joe—I only know that I was once the happy owner of a red-leather trunk, and that my brother,

when I first saw him at Cambridge, upon my inquiring after my papers, &c., told me that in a red-leather trunk they were all safely deposited. The whole contents of it are little worth, and if I never see them more, I shall be but very moderately afflicted by the loss, though I fancy the trunk upon the road will prove to be the very trunk in question.

Together with your letter came a bill from my quondam hosier, in Fleet Street, Mr. Reynolds, for the sum of two pounds ten shillings, desiring present payment, cash being scarce. I sent him an order for the money by this day's post. My future expenses in the hosiery way will be small, for Mrs. Unwin knits all my stockings, and would knit my hats too, if that were possible. . . .

Having commenced gardener, I study the arts of pruning, sowing, and planting; and enterprise everything in that way, from melons down to cabbages. I have a large garden to display my abilities in, and, were we twenty miles nearer London, I might turn higgler, and serve your honour with cauliflowers, and broccoli, at the best hand. I shall possibly now and then desire you to call at the seed-shop, in your way to Westminster, though sparingly. Should I do it often, you would begin to think you had a mother-in-law at Berkhampstead.—Yours, dear Joe,

Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

June 16, 1767.

Dear Joe—This part of the world is not productive of much news, unless the coldness of the weather be so, which is excessive for the season. We expect, or rather experience a warm contest between the candidates for the county: the preliminary movements of bribery, threatening, and drunkenness, being already taken. The Sandwich interest seems to shake, though both parties are very sanguine. Lord Carysfort is supposed to be in great jeopardy, though as yet, I

imagine, a clear judgement cannot be formed; for a man may have all the noise on his side, and yet lose his election. You know me to be an uninterested person, and I am sure I am a very ignorant one in things of this kind. I only wish it was over, for it occasions the most detestable scene of profligacy and riot that can be imagined.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

To MRS. COWPER

Huntingdon, July 13, 1767.

My dear Cousin—The newspaper has told you the truth. Poor Mr. Unwin being flung from his horse, as he was going to the church on Sunday morning, received a dreadful fracture on the back part of the skull, under which he languished till Thursday evening, and then died. This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits, which will not presently be worn off. He died in a poor cottage, to which he was carried immediately after his fall, about a mile from home; and his body could not be brought to his house till the spirit was gone to Him who gave it. May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day nor the hour when our Lord cometh!

The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a mother to a son. . . . W. C.

To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

[*Olney*] 1769.

Dear Joe—Sir Thomas crosses the Alps, and Sir Cowper, for that is his title at Olney, prefers his home to any other spot of earth in the world. Horace, observing this difference of temper in different persons, cried out a good many years ago, in the true spirit of poetry, 'How much one man differs from another!' This does not seem a very sublime exclamation in

English, but I remember we were taught to admire it in the original.

My dear friend, I am obliged to you for your invitation: but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man. But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days.

I love you and yours; I thank you for your continued remembrance of me, and shall not cease to be their and your affectionate friend, and servant,

W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Jan. 1, 1771.

Dear Joseph—You will receive two parcels of venison, a haunch and a shoulder. The first was intended for you, the other comes to you by mistake. Some hours after the basket was sent to the wagon, we discovered that the shoulder had been packed up instead of the haunch. All imaginable endeavours were made to recover it, but without success, the wagon could not be unloaded again, and it was impossible otherwise to get at it. You may therefore thank a blundering servant for a venison pasty, which if she had minded her business better would have been eaten at Olney.—Yours, my dear Friend, Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

July 6, 1776.

My dear Friend—As you have an extensive acquaintance, you may possibly be able to serve me in a design

I have lately formed, of taking two, three, or four boys, under my tuition, to instruct them in the Greek and Latin languages. I should pursue, with some few exceptions, the Westminster method of instruction, being that which I am best acquainted with myself, and the best upon the whole that I have had an opportunity of observing. They would lodge and board under our roof, and be in all respects accommodated and attended in a manner that would well warrant the demand of an hundred guineas per annum.

You have often wished me an employment, and I know none but this for which I am qualified. If I can engage in it, it will probably be serviceable to me in more respects than one: but as it will afford me some sort of an establishment, at least for a time, it cannot but be desirable to one in my circumstances. If you are acquainted therefore with any person who has a son or sons between eight and ten years of age, for whom he would wish to find a tutor who will not make a property of them, nor neglect any means in his power to inform them thoroughly in what he undertakes to teach, you will oblige me by recommending *me*. Doubtless there are many such; and it is not an easy matter to find a family where the two grand points of education, literature and sobriety, would be more closely attended to than in this.

We return you many thanks for the fine turbot you was so kind as to send.—Believe me yours, etc.,

WM. COWPER.

To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Aug. 1, 1776.

My dear Friend—The coldness of the past season would be forgotten in the heat of the present, if the effects of it were not still visible in the garden. My melons, which ought to have been eaten or at least eatable by this time, are not yet ripe; and as you are taking your repose at Wargrove, you will agree with me, I imagine, that it would hardly be worth while

to trundle them so far. Else, as I flatter myself they will be better flavoured than such as are raised for sale, which are generally flashy, and indebted to the watering-pot for their size, I should have been glad to have sent you half my crop.

If it were to rain pupils, perhaps I might catch a tub full; but till it does, the fruitlessness of my inquiries makes me think I must keep my Greek and Latin to myself.—Yours affectionately, Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Nov. 12, 1776.

Dear Friend—The very agreeable contents of your last came safe to hand in the shape of two notes for thirty pounds. I am to thank you likewise for a barrel of very good oysters, received about a fortnight ago. One to whom fish is so welcome as it is to me, can have no great occasion to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable, will be sure to find me ready to receive them; butts, plaice, flounder, or any other. If herrings are yet to be had, as they cannot be bought at Olney till they are good for nothing, they will be welcome too. We have seen none this year, except a parcel that Mrs. Unwin sent for, and the fishmonger sent stale ones, a trick they are apt to play upon their customers at a distance.

Having suffered so much from nervous fevers myself, I know how to congratulate Ashley upon his recovery. Other distempers only batter the walls; but *they* creep silently into the citadel, and put the garrison to the sword.

You perceive I have not made a squeamish use of your obliging offer. The remembrance of past years, and of the sentiments formerly exchanged in our evening walks, convinces me still that an unreserved acceptance of what is graciously offered is the handsomest way of dealing with one of your character.—Believe me yours, Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Jan. 5, 1777.

Dear Joseph—I am much obliged to you for a tub of very fine spiced salmon which arrived yesterday: it cost us some debate, and a wager into the bargain, one asserting it to be sturgeon, and the other what it proved to be. But the lady was in the right, as she should be upon all such occasions.

My respects wait upon your family. The cold is excessive; but I have a little greenhouse, which by the help of a little fire, is as blooming and as green as May.—Yours affectionately, Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

April—I fancy the 20th, 1777.

My dear Friend—Thanks for a turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone: a gentleman who relates his travels so agreeably, that he deserves always to travel with an agreeable companion. I have been reading Gray's Works, and think him the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written; but I like Gray's better. His humour, or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive, and yet, I think equally poignant with the Dean's.—I am yours affectionately,

Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

May 25, 1777.

My dear Friend—We differ not much in our opinion of Mr. Gray. When I wrote last, I was in the middle of the book. His later Epistles, I think, are worth

little, *as such*, but might be turned to excellent account by a young student of taste and judgement. As to Mr. West's Letters, I think I could easily bring your opinion of them to square with mine. They are elegant and sensible, but having nothing in them that is characteristic, or that discriminates them from the letters of any other young man of taste and learning. As to the book you mention, I am in doubt whether to read it or not. I should like the philosophical part of it, but the political, which, I suppose, is a detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants, a history of rising and falling nabobs, I should have no appetite to at all. I will not, therefore, give you the trouble of sending it at present.—Yours affectionately, WM. COWPER.

To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

July 13, 1777.

My dear Friend—You need not give yourself any further trouble to procure me the South Sea voyages. Lord Dartmouth, who was here about a month since, and was so kind as to pay me two visits, has furnished me with both Cook's and Forster's. 'Tis well for the poor natives of those distant countries that our national expenses cannot be supplied by cargoes of yams and bananas. Curiosity, therefore, being once satisfied, they may possibly be permitted for the future to enjoy their riches of that kind in peace.

If, when you are most at leisure, you can find out Baker upon the Microscope, or Vincent Bourne's Latin Poems, the last edition, and send them, I shall be obliged to you. Either, or both, if they can be easily found.—I am yours affectionately, WM. COWPER.

To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Oct. 23, 1777.

My dear Friend—If a melon in the spring is a rarity, a melon in the beginning of winter perhaps may be so

too, especially after so sharp a frost as we have lately had, and still more if it should happen to be a frost when you eat it. This and the fellow to it grew upon one joint. The vine was never watered since it was a seed. We ate part of one of them to-day, and thought it good; the other, which is better ripened, we supposed might be even worthy of a place at your table, and have sent it accordingly.

I am obliged to you for three parcels of herrings. The melon is a crimson Cantalupe.—Believe me, affectionately yours, WM. COWPER.

The basket contains, besides, Bourne's Poems and Baker on the Microscope, with thanks.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

May 7, 1778.

My dear Friend—I have been in continual fear lest every post should bring a summons for the Abbé Raynal; and am glad that I have finished him before my fears were realized. I have kept him long, but not through neglect or idleness. I read the five volumes to Mrs. Unwin; and my voice will seldom serve me with more than an hour's reading at a time. I am indebted to him for much information upon subjects, which, however interesting, are so remote from those with which country folks in general are conversant, that had not his works reached me at Olney, I should have been for ever ignorant of them.

I admire him as a philosopher, as a writer, as a man of extraordinary intelligence, and no less extraordinary abilities to digest it. He is a true patriot. But then the world is his country. The frauds and tricks of the cabinet, and the counter, seem to be equally objects of his aversion. And if he had not found that religion too had undergone a mixture of artifice, in its turn, perhaps he would have been a Christian.—Yours affectionately, WM. COWPER.

To the Rev. William Unwin

My dear William—The fish happening to swim uppermost in my mind, I give it the precedence, and begin with returning our thanks for it, not forgetting the circumstance of free carriage. Upon the whole, I think this a handsomer way of acknowledging a present than to tuck it into a postscript. . . .

You, I think, was never a dabbler in rhyme. I have been one ever since I was fourteen years of age, when I began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. I have no more right to the name of a poet, than a maker of mouse-traps has to that of an engineer; but my little exploits in this way have at times amused me so much, that I have often wished myself a good one. Such a talent in verse as mine is like a child's rattle,—very entertaining to the trifler that uses it, and very disagreeable to all beside. But it has served to rid me of some melancholy moments, for I only take it up as a gentleman performer does his fiddle. I have this peculiarity belonging to me as a rhymist, that though I am charmed to a great degree with my own work, while it is on the anvil, I can seldom bear to look at it when it is once finished. The more I contemplate it, the more it loses of its value, till I am at last quite disgusted with it. I then throw it by, take it up again perhaps ten years after, and am as much delighted with it as at first.

Few people have the art of being agreeable when they talk of themselves; if you are not weary therefore by this time you pay me a high compliment.

I dare say Miss S—— was much diverted with the conjecture of her friends. The true key to the pleasure she found at Olney was plain enough to be seen, but they chose to overlook it. She brought with her a disposition to be pleased, which whoever does is sure to find a visit agreeable, because they make it so.—Yours,

W. C.

To the Rev. W. Unwin

July 18, 1778.

My dear Friend—I hurry you into the midst of things at once, which if it be not much in the epistolary style, is acknowledged however to be very sublime. Mr. Morley, videlicet the grocer, is guilty of much neglect and carelessness, and has lately so much disappointed your mother, that she is at last obliged to leave him, and begs you will send her Mr. Rawlinson's address, that she may transfer her custom to him. She adds, moreover, that she was well aware of the unseasonableness of salmon at this time, and did not mean that you should order any to Olney till the spring.

We are indebted to you for your political intelligence, but have it not in our power to pay you in kind. Proceed, however, to give us such information as cannot be learned from the newspaper; and when anything arises at Olney, that is not in the threadbare style of daily occurrences, you shall hear of it in return. Nothing of this sort has happened lately, except that a lion was imported here at the fair, seventy years of age, and was as tame as a goose. Your mother and I saw him embrace his keeper with his paws, and lick his face. Others saw him receive his head in his mouth, and restore it to him again unhurt;—a sight we chose not to be favoured with, but rather advised the honest man to discontinue the practice,—a practice hardly reconcilable to prudence, unless he had a head to spare. The beast, however, was a very magnificent one, and much more royal in his appearance than those I have seen in the Tower. . . .—Yours, with thanks for your last, Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. W. Unwin

Dec. 3, 1778.

My dear Friend—I was last night agreeably surprised by the arrival of Mr. Dodsley. His own merit is his

sufficient recommendation; but his appearance, without having been expected or even thought of, made him still more welcome. You have done a kind thing in sending him, and I wish we could recompense it by a pine-apple for every volume.

I made Mr. Wright's gardener a present of fifty sorts of stove plant seeds: in return, he has presented me with six fruiting pines, which I have put into a bark bed, where they thrive at present as well as I could wish. If they produce good fruit, you will stand some little chance to partake of them. But you must not expect giants, for being transplanted in December will certainly give them a check, and probably diminish their size. He has promised to supply me with still better plants in October, which is the proper season for moving them, and with a reinforcement every succeeding year. Mrs. Hill sent me the seeds; which perhaps could not have been purchased for less than three guineas. 'Tis thus we great gardeners establish a beneficial intercourse with each other, and furnish ourselves with valuable things that, therefore, cost us nothing.

How did you escape the storm? It did us no damage, except keeping us awake, and giving your mother the headache; and except—what can hardly be called a damage, lifting a long and heavy palisade from the top of our garden wall, and setting it so gently down upon two old hot-beds, that it was not at all broken or impaired.

Your mother is well at present, and sends her love, joining with me, at the same time, in affectionate remembrances to all the family.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

May 26, 1779.

My dear Friend—I must beg your assistance in a design I have formed to cheat the glazier. Government has laid a tax upon glass, and he has trebled it.

I want as much as will serve for a large frame, but am unwilling to pay an exorbitant price for it. I shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you will inquire at a glass-manufacturer's how he sells his Newcastle glass, such as is used for frames and hothouses. If you will be so good as to send me this information, and at the same time the manufacturer's address, I will execute the rest of the business myself, without giving you any further trouble.

I am obliged to you for the Poets; and though I little thought that I was translating so much money out of your pocket into the bookseller's, when I turned Prior's poem into Latin, yet I must needs say that, if you think it worth while to purchase the English Classics at all, you cannot possess yourself of them upon better terms. I have looked into some of the volumes, but not having yet finished the Register, have merely looked into them. A few things I have met with, which if they had been burned the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any; the English Muse would have lost no credit by the omission of such trash. Some of them again seem to me to have but a very disputable right to a place among the Classics; and I am quite at a loss, when I see them in such company, to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honour, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will exclude none that do.

Your mother sends her love and affectionate remembrance to all at Stock, from the tallest to the shortest there, in which she is accompanied by yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

July —79.

My dear Friend—If you please, you may give my service to Mr. James Martin, glazier, and tell him that I have furnished myself with glass from Bedford, for half the money.

When I was at Margate, it was an excursion of pleasure to go to see Ramsgate. The pier, I remember, was accounted a most excellent piece of stone-work, and such I found it. By this time, I suppose, it is finished; and surely it is no small advantage, that you have an opportunity of observing how nicely those great stones are put together, as often as you please, without either trouble or expense. But you think Margate more lively. So is a Cheshire cheese full of mites more lively than a sound one: but that very liveliness only proves its rottenness. I remember, too, that Margate, though full of company, was generally filled with such company, as people who were nice in the choice of their company, were rather fearful of keeping company with. The hoy went to London every week, loaded with mackerel and herrings, and returned loaded with company. The cheapness of the conveyance made it equally commodious for Dead fish and Lively company. So, perhaps, your solitude at Ramsgate may turn out another advantage; at least I should think it one.

There was not, at that time, much to be seen in the Isle of Thanet, besides the beauty of the country, and the fine prospects of the sea, which are nowhere surpassed except in the Isle of Wight, or upon some parts of the coast of Hampshire. One sight, however, I remember, engaged my curiosity, and I went to see it:—a fine piece of ruins, built by the late Lord Holland, at a great expense, which, the day after I saw it, tumbled down for nothing. Perhaps, therefore, it is still a ruin; and if it is, I would advise you by all means to visit it, as it must have been much improved

by this fortunate incident. It is hardly possible to put stones together with that air of wild and magnificent disorder which they are sure to acquire by falling of their own accord.

We heartily wish that Mrs. Unwin may receive the utmost benefit of bathing. At the same time we caution *you* against the use of it, however the heat of the weather may seem to recommend it. It is not safe for thin habits, hectically inclined.

I remember,—(the fourth and last thing I mean to remember upon this occasion,) that Sam Cox the counsel, walking by the seaside as if absorbed in deep contemplation, was questioned about what he was musing on. He replied, 'I was wondering that such an almost infinite and unwieldy element should produce a *sprat*.' Our love attends your whole party.—Yours affectionately, W. C.

P.S.—You are desired to purchase three pounds of sixpenny white worsted, at a shop well recommended for that commodity. The Isle of Thanet is famous for it, beyond any other place in the kingdom.

To the Rev. William Unwin

July 17, 1779.

My dear Friend—We envy you your sea-breezes. In the garden we feel nothing but the reflection of the heat from the walls; and in the parlour, from the opposite houses. I fancy Virgil was so situated when he wrote those two beautiful lines:

> *——Oh quis me gelidis in vallibus Haemi*
> *Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbra!*

The worst of it is, that though the sunbeams strike as forcibly upon my harp-strings as they did upon his, they elicit no such sounds, but rather produce such groans as they are said to have drawn from those of the statue of Memnon.

As you have ventured to make the experiment, your own experience will be your best guide in the article of bathing. An inference will hardly follow, though one should pull at it with all one's might, from Smollett's case to yours. He was corpulent, muscular, and strong; whereas, if you were either stolen or strayed, such a description of you in an advertisement would hardly direct an inquirer with sufficient accuracy and exactness. But if bathing does not make your head ache, or prevent your sleeping at night, I should imagine it could not hurt you.

I remember taking a walk upon the strand at Margate, where the cliff is high and perpendicular. At long intervals there are cart-ways, cut through the rock down to the beach, and there is no other way of access to it, or of return from it. I walked near a mile upon the water edge, without observing that the tide was rising fast upon me. When I *did* observe it, it was almost too late. I ran every step back again, and had much ado to save my distance. I mention this as a caution, lest you should happen at any time to be surprised as I was. It would be very unpleasant to be forced to cling, like a cat, to the side of a precipice, and perhaps hardly possible to do it, for four hours without any respite.

It seems a trifle, but it is a real disadvantage to have no better name to pass by than the gentleman you mention. Whether we suppose him settled and promoted in the army, the church, or the law, how uncouth the sound—Captain Twopenny! Bishop Twopenny! Judge Twopenny! The abilities of Lord Mansfield would hardly impart a dignity to such a name. Should he perform deeds worthy of poetical panegyric, how difficult would it be to ennoble the sound of Twopenny!

> Muse! place him high upon the lists of Fame,
> The wonderous man, and Twopenny his name!

But to be serious, if the French should land in the Isle of Thanet, and Mr. Twopenny should fall into

their hands, he will have a fair opportunity to frenchify his name, and may call himself Monsieur Deux Sous; which, when he comes to be exchanged by Cartel, will easily resume an English form, and slide naturally into Two Shoes, in my mind a considerable improvement.—Yours affectionately, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Sept. 21, 1779.

Amico Mio—Be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames designed to receive my pine plants; but I cannot mend the kitchen windows, till by the help of that implement I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber I should be a complete glazier; and possibly the happy time may come, when I shall be seen trudging away to the neighbouring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple; and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, 'that he had found the Emilius who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea.' I would recommend it to you to follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place.

I have eight pair of tame pigeons. When I first enter the garden in a morning, I find them perched upon the wall, waiting for their breakfast; for I feed them always upon the gravel-walk. If your wish

should be accomplished, and you should find yourself furnished with the wings of a dove, I shall undoubtedly find you amongst them. Only be so good, if that should be the case, to announce yourself by some means or other. For I imagine your crop will require something better than tares to fill it.

Your mother and I last week made a trip in a post-chaise to Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wright, about four miles off. He understood that I did not much affect strange faces, and sent over his servant on purpose to inform me that he was going into Leicestershire, and that if I chose to see the gardens, I might gratify myself without danger of seeing the proprietor. I accepted the invitation, and was delighted with all I found there. The situation is happy, the gardens elegantly disposed, the hot-house in the most flourishing state, and the orange trees the most captivating creatures of the kind I ever saw. A man, in short, had need have the talents of Cox or Langford, the auctioneers, to do the whole scene justice. Our love attends you all.—Yours,

W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Oct. 2, 1779.

My dear Friend—. . . The newspaper informs me of the arrival of the Jamaica fleet. I hope it imports some pine-apple plants for me. I have a good frame and a good bed prepared to receive them. I send you annexed a fable, in which the pine-apple makes a figure, and shall be glad if you like the taste of it. Two pair of soles, with shrimps, which arrived last night, demand my acknowledgements. You have heard that when Arion performed upon the harp, the fish followed him. I really have no design to fiddle you out of more fish, but if you should esteem my verses worthy of such a price, though I shall never be so renowned as he was, I shall think myself equally indebted to the muse that helps me. . . .—Yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Oct. 31, 1779.

My dear Friend—I wrote my last letter merely to inform you that I had nothing to say; in answer to which you have said nothing. I admire the propriety of your conduct though I am a loser by it. I will endeavour to say something now, and shall hope for something in return.

I have been well entertained with Johnson's biography, for which I thank you: with one exception, and that a swingeing one, I think he has acquitted himself with his usual good sense and sufficiency. His treatment of Milton is unmerciful to the last degree. A pensioner is not likely to spare a republican; and the Doctor, in order, I suppose, to convince his royal patron of the sincerity of his monarchical principles, has belaboured that great poet's character with the most industrious cruelty. As a man, he has hardly left him the shadow of one good quality. Churlishness in his private life, and a rancorous hatred of everything royal in his public, are the two colours with which he has smeared all the canvas. If he had any virtues, they are not to be found in the Doctor's picture of him; and it is well for Milton, that some sourness in his temper is the only vice with which his memory has been charged; it is evident enough that if his biographer could have discovered more, he would not have spared him. As a poet, he has treated him with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse's wing, and trampled them under his great foot. He has passed sentence of condemnation upon Lycidas, and has taken occasion, from that charming poem, to expose to ridicule (what is indeed ridiculous enough), the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if Lycidas was the prototype and pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails in it, go for

nothing. I am convinced, by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever anything so delightful as the music of the Paradise Lost? It is like that of a fine organ; has the fullest and the deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute. Variety without end and never equalled, unless perhaps by Virgil. Yet the Doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation. Oh! I could thresh his old jacket, till I made his pension jingle in his pocket.

I could talk a good while longer, but I have no room; our love attends you.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Nov. 14, 1779.

My dear Friend — Your approbation of my last Heliconian present encourages me to send you another.[1] I wrote it, indeed, on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreeable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sunbeams from their surface. . . . Yours affectionately, Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Dec. 2, 1779.

My dear Friend—How quick is the succession of human events! The cares of to-day are seldom the cares of to-morrow; and when we lie down at night, we may safely say to most of our troubles—'Ye have done your worst, and we shall meet no more.'

[1] 'On the Promotion of Edward Thurlow.'

This observation was suggested to me by reading your last letter; which though I have written since I received it, I have never answered. When that epistle passed under your pen, you were miserable about your tithes, and your imagination was hung round with pictures, that terrified you to such a degree, as made even the receipt of money burdensome. But it is all over now. You sent away your farmers in good humour (for you can make people merry whenever you please), and now you have nothing to do but to chink your purse, and laugh at what is past. Your delicacy makes you groan under that which other men never feel, or feel but slightly. A fly, that settles upon the tip of the nose, is troublesome; and this is a comparison adequate to the most that mankind in general are sensible of, upon such tiny occasions. But the flies that pester you, always get between your eyelids, where the annoyance is almost insupportable.

I would follow your advice, and endeavour to furnish Lord North with a scheme of supplies for the ensuing year, if the difficulty I find in answering the call of my own emergencies did not make me despair of satisfying those of the nation. I can say but this; if I had ten acres of land in the world, whereas I have not one, and in those ten acres should discover a gold mine, richer than all Mexico and Peru, when I had reserved a few ounces for my own annual supply, I would willingly give the rest to government. My ambition would be more gratified by annihilating the national incumbrances, than by going daily down to the bottom of a mine, to wallow in my own emolument. This is patriotism, you will allow; but, alas, this virtue is for the most part in the hands of those who can do no good with it! He that has but a single handful of it, catches so greedily at the first opportunity of growing rich, that his patriotism drops to the ground, and he grasps the gold instead of it. He that never meets with such an opportunity, holds it fast in his clenched fists, and says,—'Oh, how much good I would do, if I could!'

Your mother says—'Pray send my dear love.' There is hardly room to add mine, but you will suppose it.—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Feb. 27, 1780.

My dear Friend—As you are pleased to desire my letters, I am the more pleased with writing them; though at the same time I must needs testify my surprise that you should think them worth receiving, as I seldom send one that I think favourably of myself. This is not to be understood as an imputation upon your taste or judgement, but as an encomium upon my own modesty and humility, which I desire you to remark well. It is a just observation of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that though men of ordinary talents may be highly satisfied with their own productions, men of true genius never are. Whatever be their subject, they always seem to themselves to fall short of it, even when they seem to others most to excel. And for this reason—because they have a certain sublime sense of perfection, which other men are strangers to, and which they themselves in their performances are not able to exemplify. Your servant, Sir Joshua! I little thought of seeing you when I began; but as you have popped in you are welcome.

When I wrote last, I was a little inclined to send you a copy of verses entitled the Modern Patriot, but was not quite pleased with a line or two, which I found it difficult to mend, therefore did not. At night I read Mr. Burke's speech in the newspaper, and was so well pleased with his proposals for a reformation, and with the temper in which he made them, that I began to think better of his cause, and burnt my verses. Such is the lot of the man who writes upon the subject of the day; the aspect of affairs changes in an hour or two, and his opinion with it; what was just and well-deserved satire in the morning, in the even-

ing becomes a libel; the author commences his own judge, and while he condemns with unrelenting severity what he so lately approved, is sorry to find that he has laid his leaf-gold upon touchwood, which crumbled away under his fingers. Alas! what can I do with my wit? I have not enough to do great things with, and these little things are so fugitive, that while a man catches at the subject, he is only filling his hand with smoke. I must do with it as I do with my linnet; I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door, that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again. My whisking wit has produced the following, the subject of which is more important than the manner in which I have treated it seems to imply, but a fable may speak truth, and all truth is sterling; I only premise, that in a philosophical tract in the Register, I found it asserted that the glow-worm is the nightingale's food.[1]

Have you heard? who has not? for a recommendatory advertisement of it is already published;—that a certain kinsman of your humble servant's has written a tract, now in the press, to prove polygamy a divine institution! A plurality of wives is intended, but not of husbands. The end proposed by the author is to remedy the prevailing practice of seduction,[2] by making the female delinquent *ipso facto* the lawful wife of the male. An officer of a regiment, part of which is quartered here, gave one of the soldiers leave to be drunk six weeks, in hopes of curing him by satiety: he *was* drunk six weeks, and is so still, as often as he can find an opportunity. One vice may swallow up another, but no coroner in the state of Ethics ever brought in his verdict, when a vice died, that it was—*felo de se.*

They who value the man are sorry for his book: the rest say,

Solvuntur risu tabulae, tu missus abibis.

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1 This Letter contained the fable of the Nightingale and Glow-worm.

2 In the original letter it is *adultery*,—but I have thought it right to correct an obvious mistake in writing.—SOUTHEY.

Thanks for all you have done, and all you intend; the biography will be particularly welcome.—Yours,
W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

April 6, 1780.

My dear Friend— . . . I am obliged to you for what you said upon the subject of book-buying, and am very fond of availing myself of another man's pocket, when I can do it creditably to myself, and without injury to him. Amusements are necessary, in a retirement like mine, especially in such a state of mind as I labour under. The necessity of amusement makes me sometimes write verses; it made me a carpenter, a birdcage maker, a gardener; and has lately taught me to draw, and to draw too with such surprising proficiency in the art, considering my total ignorance of it two months ago, that when I show your mother my productions, she is all admiration and applause.

You need never fear the communication of what you entrust to us in confidence. You know your mother's delicacy in this point sufficiently; and as for me, I once wrote a Connoisseur upon the subject of secret-keeping, and from that day to this I believe I have never divulged one. . . .

Believe me yours, with the customary, but not therefore unmeaning addition of love to all under your roof. Your mother sends hers, which being maternal, is put up in a separate parcel. W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Olney, April 16, 1780.

Since I wrote my last we have had a visit from ———. I did not feel myself vehemently disposed to receive him with that complaisance from which a stranger generally infers that he is welcome. By his manner, which was rather bold than easy, I judged that there was no occasion for it, and that it

was a trifle which, if he did not meet with, neither would he feel the want of. He has the air of a travelled man, but not of a travelled gentleman; is quite delivered from that reserve which is so common an ingredient in the English character, yet does not open himself gently and gradually, as men of polite behaviour do, but bursts upon you all at once. He talks very loud, and when our poor little robins hear a great noise, they are immediately seized with an ambition to surpass it; the increase of their vociferation occasioned an increase of his, and his in return acted as a stimulus upon theirs; neither side entertained a thought of giving up the contest, which became continually more interesting to our ears, during the whole visit. The birds, however, survived it, and so did we. They perhaps flatter themselves they gained a complete victory, but I believe Mr. ——— could have killed them both in another hour. W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

May 3, 1780.

Dear Sir—You indulge me in such a variety of subjects, and allow me such a latitude of excursion in this scribbling employment, that I have no excuse for silence. I am much obliged to you for swallowing such boluses as I send you, for the sake of my gilding, and verily believe that I am the only man alive, from whom they would be welcome to a palate like yours. I wish I could make them more splendid than they are, more alluring to the eye, at least, if not more pleasing to the taste; but my leaf gold is tarnished, and has received such a tinge from the vapours that are ever brooding over my mind, that I think it no small proof of your partiality to me, that you will read my letters. I am not fond of long-winded metaphors; I have always observed, that they halt at the latter end of their progress, and so do mine. I deal much in ink indeed, but not such ink as is employed by

poets, and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks, and dab-chicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them; and her praise, and my praise put together, are fame enough for me. Oh! I could spend whole days and moonlight nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow. If every human being upon earth could think for one quarter of an hour as I have done for many years, there might perhaps be many miserable men among them, but not an unawakened one could be found from the arctic to the antarctic circle. At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the earth,—what are the planets,—what is the sun itself but a bauble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, 'The Maker of all these wonders is my friend!' Their eyes have never been opened to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things of consequence; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back, and walk away with; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it, and given it air, I say to myself—'This is not mine, it is a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon.'

W. C.

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To the Rev. William Unwin

May 8, 1780.

My dear Friend—My scribbling humour has of late been entirely absorbed in the passion for landscape drawing. It is a most amusing art, and like every other art, requires much practice and attention.

Nil sine multo
Vita labore dedit mortalibus.

Excellence is providentially placed beyond the reach of indolence, that success may be the reward of industry, and that idleness may be punished with obscurity and disgrace. So long as I am pleased with an employment, I am capable of unwearied application, because my feelings are all of the intense kind. I never received a *little* pleasure from anything in my life: if I am delighted, it is in the extreme. The unhappy consequence of this temperature [? temperament] is, that my attachment to any occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it. That nerve of my imagination that feels the touch of any particular amusement, twangs under the energy of the pressure with so much vehemence, that it soon becomes sensible of weariness and fatigue. Hence I draw an unfavourable prognostic, and expect that I shall shortly be constrained to look out for something else. Then perhaps I may string the lyre again, and be able to comply with your demand.

Now for the visit you propose to pay us, and propose *not* to pay us; the hope of which plays about upon your paper, like a jack-o'-lantern upon the ceiling. This is no mean simile, for Virgil (you remember) uses it. It is here, it is there, it vanishes, it returns, it dazzles you, a cloud interposes and it is gone. However just the comparison, I hope you will contrive to spoil it, and that your final determination will be to come. As to the masons you expect, bring them with you;—bring brick, bring mortar, bring everything that would oppose itself to your journey;—all shall be

welcome. I have a greenhouse that is too small, come and enlarge it; build me a pinery; repair the garden wall, that has great need of your assistance; do anything; you cannot do too much; so far from thinking you and your train troublesome, we shall rejoice to see you, upon these or upon any other terms you can propose. . . .—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

May 10, 1780.

My dear Friend—If authors could have lived to adjust and authenticate their own text, a commentator would have been an useless creature. For instance—if Dr. Bentley had found, or opined that he had found, the word *tube* where it seemed to present itself to you, and had judged the subject worthy of his critical acumen, he would either have justified the corrupt reading, or have substituted some invention of his own, in defence of which he would have exerted all his polemical abilities, and have quarrelled with half the literati in Europe. Then suppose the writer himself, as in the present case, to interpose with a gentle whisper thus—'If you look again, Doctor, you will perceive that what appears to you to be *tube*, is neither more nor less than the simple monosyllable *ink*, but I wrote it in great haste, and the want of sufficient precision in the character has occasioned your mistake: *you* will be especially satisfied when you see the sense[1] elucidated by the explanation.'—But I question whether the doctor would quit his ground, or allow any author to be a competent judge in his own case. The world, however, would acquiesce immediately, and vote the critic useless.

James Andrews, who is my Michael Angelo, pays me many compliments on my success in the art of drawing, but I have not yet the vanity to think myself qualified to furnish your apartment. If I should ever attain to the degree of self-opinion requisite to such

[1] The passage alluded to seems to be in his letter of May 3, p. 37.

an undertaking, I shall labour at it with pleasure. I can only say, though I hope not with the affected modesty of the above-mentioned Dr. Bentley, who said the same thing,

Me quoque dicunt
Vatem pastores. Sed non Ego credulus illis.

A crow, rook, or raven, has built a nest in one of the young elm trees, at the side of Mrs. Aspray's orchard. In the violent storm that blew yesterday morning, I saw it agitated to a degree that seemed to threaten its immediate destruction, and versified the following thoughts upon the occasion.[1]

W. C.

To Mrs. Newton

June, 1780.

Dear Madam—When I write to Mr. Newton, he answers me by letter; when I write to you, you answer me in fish. I return you many thanks for the mackerel and lobster. They assured me in terms as intelligible as pen and ink could have spoken, that you still remember *Orchard-side*; and though they never spoke in their lives, and it was still less to be expected from them that they should speak, being dead, they gave us an assurance of your affection that corresponds exactly with that which Mr. Newton expresses towards us in all his letters.—For my own part, I never in my life began a letter more at a venture than the present. It is possible that I may finish it, but perhaps more than probable that I shall not. I have had several indifferent nights, and the wind is easterly; two circumstances so unfavourable to me in all my occupations, but especially that of writing, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could even bring myself to attempt it.

You have never yet perhaps been made acquainted with the unfortunate Tom Freeman's misadventure. He and his wife returning from Hanslip fair, were

[1] Cowper's Fable of the Raven concluded this letter.

coming down Weston Lane; to wit, themselves, their horse, and their great wooden panniers, at ten o'clock at night. The horse having a lively imagination, and very weak nerves, fancied he either saw or heard something, but has never been able to say what. A sudden fright will impart activity, and a momentary vigour, even to lameness itself. Accordingly, he started, and sprung from the middle of the road to the side of it, with such surprising alacrity, that he dismounted the gingerbread baker and his gingerbread wife in a moment. Not contented with this effort, nor thinking himself yet out of danger, he proceeded as fast as he could to a full gallop, rushed against the gate at the bottom of the lane, and opened it for himself, without perceiving that there was any gate there. Still he galloped, and with a velocity and momentum continually increasing, till he arrived in Olney. I had been in bed about ten minutes, when I heard the most uncommon and unaccountable noise that can be imagined. It was, in fact, occasioned by the clattering of tin pattypans and a Dutch-oven against the sides of the panniers. Much gingerbread was picked up in the street, and Mr. Lucy's windows were broken all to pieces. Had this been all, it would have been a comedy, but we learned the next morning, that the poor woman's collar-bone was broken, and she has hardly been able to resume her occupation since.

What is added on the other side, if I could have persuaded myself to write sooner, would have reached you sooner; 'tis about ten days old. . . .—Yours, dear Madam, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

June 8, 1780.

My dear Friend—It is possible I might have indulged myself in the pleasure of writing to you, without waiting for a letter from you, but for a reason which you will not easily guess. Your mother communicated to

me the satisfaction you expressed in my correspondence, that you thought me entertaining and clever, and so forth :—now you must know, I love praise dearly, especially from the judicious, and those who have so much delicacy themselves as not to offend mine in giving it. But then, I found this consequence attending, or likely to attend, the eulogium you bestowed ;—if my friend thought me witty before, he shall think me ten times more witty hereafter ;—where I joked once, I will joke five times, and for one sensible remark I will send him a dozen. Now this foolish vanity would have spoiled me quite, and would have made me as disgusting a letter-writer as Pope, who seems to have thought that unless a sentence was well turned, and every period pointed with some conceit, it was not worth the carriage. Accordingly he is to me, except in very few instances, the most disagreeable maker of epistles that ever I met with. I was willing, therefore, to wait till the impression your commendation had made upon the foolish part of me was worn off, that I might scribble away as usual, and write my uppermost thoughts, and those only. . . .

An English Versification of a Thought that popped into my Head about two Months since.

Sweet stream ! that winds through yonder glade—
Apt emblem of a virtuous maid !—
Silent, and chaste, she steals along,
Far from the world's gay, busy throng ;
With gentle, yet prevailing force,
Intent upon her destin'd course :
Graceful, and useful, all she does,
Blessing, and bless'd, where'er she goes :
Pure-bosom'd, as that watery glass
And Heaven reflected in her face !

Now this is not so exclusively applicable to a maiden, as to be the sole property of your sister Shuttleworth. If you look at Mrs. Unwin, you will see that she has not lost her right to this just praise by marrying you.

Your mother sends her love to all, and mine comes jogging along by the side of it.—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

July 27, 1780.

My dear Friend—As two men sit silent, after having exhausted all their topics of conversation, one says—'It is very fine weather,'—and the other says—'Yes';—one blows his nose, and the other rubs his eyebrows (by the way, this is very much in Homer's manner); such seems to be the case between you and me. After a silence of some days, I wrote you a long something, that (I suppose) was nothing to the purpose, because it has not afforded you materials for an answer. Nevertheless, as it often happens in the case above-stated, one of the distressed parties, being deeply sensible of the awkwardness of a dumb duet, breaks silence again, and resolves to speak, though he has nothing to say. So it fares with me; I am with you again in the form of an epistle, though considering my present emptiness, I have reason to fear that your only joy upon the occasion will be, that it is conveyed to you in a frank.

When I began, I expected no interruption. But if I had expected interruptions without end, I should have been less disappointed. First came the barber; who, after having embellished the outside of my head, has left the inside just as unfurnished as he found it. Then came Olney bridge,—not into the house, but into the conversation. The cause relating to it was tried on Tuesday at Buckingham. The judge directed the jury to find a verdict favourable to Olney. The jury consisted of one knave and eleven fools. The last-mentioned followed the afore-mentioned, as sheep follow a bell-wether, and decided in direct opposition to the said judge. Then a flaw was discovered in the indictment. The indictment was quashed, and an order made for a new trial. The new trial will be in the King's Bench, where said knave and said fools will have nothing to do with it. So the men of Olney fling up their caps, and assure themselves of a complete

victory. A victory will save me and your mother many shillings, perhaps some pounds, which except that it has afforded me a subject to write upon, was the only reason why I have said so much about it. I know you take an interest in all that concerns us, and will consequently rejoice with us in the prospect of an event in which we are concerned so nearly.—Yours affectionately, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

July 30, 1780.

My dear Sir—You may think perhaps that I deal more liberally with Mr. Unwin, in the way of poetical export, than I do with you, and I believe you have reason: the truth is this;—If I walked the streets with a fiddle under my arm, I should never think of performing before the window of a Privy Counsellor, or a Chief Justice, but should rather make free with ears more likely to be open to such amusement. The trifles I produce in this way are indeed such trifles, that I cannot think them seasonable presents for you. Mr. Unwin himself would not be offended if I was to tell him that there is this difference between him and Mr. Newton; that the latter is already an apostle, while he himself is only undergoing the business of an incubation, with a hope that he may be hatched in time. When my Muse comes forth arrayed in sables, at least in a robe of graver cast, I make no scruple to direct her to my friend at Hoxton. This has been one reason why I have so long delayed the riddle. But lest I should seem to set a value upon it, that I do not, by making it an object of still further inquiry, here it comes:

I am just two and two, I am warm, I am cold,
And the parent of numbers that cannot be told;
I am lawful, unlawful—a duty, a fault;
I am often sold dear, good for nothing when bought,
An extraordinary boon, and a matter of course,
And yielded with pleasure—when taken by force.

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

August 6, 1780.

My dear Friend—You like to hear from me: this is a very good reason why I should write.—But I have nothing to say: this seems equally a good reason why I should not. Yet if you had alighted from your horse at our door this morning, and at this present writing, being five o'clock in the afternoon, had found occasion to say to me—'Mr. Cowper, you have not spoke since I came in; have you resolved never to speak again?' it would be but a poor reply, if in answer to the summons I should plead inability as my best and only excuse. And this by the way suggests to me a seasonable piece of instruction, and reminds me of what I am very apt to forget, when I have any epistolary business in hand, that a letter may be written upon anything or nothing just as that anything or nothing happens to occur. A man that has a journey before him twenty miles in length, which he is to perform on foot, will not hesitate and doubt whether he shall set out or not, because he does not readily conceive how he shall ever reach the end of it: for he knows, that by the simple operation of moving one foot forward first, and then the other, he shall be sure to accomplish it. So it is in the present case, and so it is in every similar case. A letter is written as a conversation is maintained, or a journey performed; not by preconcerted or premeditated means, a new contrivance, or an invention never heard of before,—but merely by maintaining a progress, and resolving as a postilion does, having once set out, never to stop till we reach the appointed end. If a man may talk without thinking, why may he not write upon the same terms? A grave gentleman of the last century, a tie-wig, square-toe, Steinkirk figure, would say—'My good sir, a man has no right to do either.' But it is to be hoped that the present century has nothing to do with the mouldy opinions of the last; and so good Sir Launcelot, or Sir

Paul, or whatever be your name, step into your picture-frame again, and look as if you thought for another century, and leave us moderns in the meantime to think when we can, and to write whether we can or not, else we might as well be dead as you are.

When we look back upon our forefathers, we seem to look back upon the people of another nation, almost upon creatures of another species. Their vast rambling mansions, spacious halls, and painted casements, the gothic porch smothered with honeysuckles, their little gardens and high walls, their box-edgings, balls of holly, and yew-tree statues, are become so entirely unfashionable now, that we can hardly believe it possible, that a people who resembled us so little in their taste, should resemble us in anything else. But in everything else, I suppose, they were our counterparts exactly; and time, that has sewed up the slashed sleeve, and reduced the large trunk hose to a neat pair of silk stockings, has left human nature just where it found it. The inside of the man at least has undergone no change. His passions, appetites, and aims, are just what they ever were. They wear perhaps a handsomer disguise than they did in days of yore; for philosophy and literature will have their effect upon the exterior; but in every other respect a modern is only an ancient in a different dress. W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

August 21, 1780.

The following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled, and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table, when it ceased. In about five minutes, a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next

room, and found that my poor favourite Puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me, that having seen her, just after she had dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out, and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chase, as being nimbler, and carrying less weight than Thomas; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In something less than an hour, Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account. That soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him, and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and Puss;—she ran right through the town, and down the lane that leads to Dropshort; a little before she came to the house, he got the start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it, sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tanyard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturges's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tanpits full of water; and while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears, and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

This frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws, and in one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever.

I do not call this an answer to your letter, but such as it is I send it, presuming upon that interest which I know you take in my minutest concerns, which I cannot express better than in the words of Terence a little varied—*Nihil mei a te alienum putas.*—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

To Mrs. Cowper, Park Street, Grosvenor Square

August 31, 1780.

My dear Cousin— . . . It costs me not much difficulty to suppose that my friends who were already grown old when I saw them last, are old still; but it costs me a good deal sometimes to think of those who were at that time young, as being older than they were. Not having been an eye-witness of the change that time has made in them, and my former idea of them not being corrected by observation, it remains the same; my memory presents me with this image unimpaired, and while it retains the resemblance of what they were, forgets that by this time the picture may have lost much of its likeness, through the alteration that succeeding years have made in the original. I know not what impressions Time may have made upon your person, for while his claws (as our grannams called them), strike deep furrows in some faces, he seems to sheathe them with much tenderness, as if fearful of doing injury to others. But though an enemy to the person, he is a friend to the mind, and you have found him so. Though even in this respect his treatment of us depends upon what he meets with at our hands; if we use him well, and listen to his admonitions, he is a friend indeed, but otherwise the worst of enemies, who takes from us daily something that we valued, and gives us nothing better in its stead. It is well with them who, like you, can stand a-tiptoe on the mountain top of human life, look down with pleasure upon the valley they have passed, and sometimes stretch their wings in joyful hope of a

happy flight into eternity. Yet a little while, and your hope will be accomplished. . . .—Yours, my dear Cousin, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Sept. 3, 1780.

My dear Friend—I am glad you are so provident, and that, while you are yet young, you have furnished yourself with the means of comfort in old age. Your crutch and your pipe may be of use to you (and may they be so), should your years be extended to an antediluvian date; and for your present accommodation, you seem to want nothing but a clerk called Snuffle, and a sexton of the name of Skeleton, to make your ministerial equipage complete.

I think I have read as much of the first volume of the Biographia as I shall ever read. I find it very amusing; more so perhaps than it would have been had they sifted their characters with more exactness, and admitted none but those who had in some way or other entitled themselves to immortality, by deserving well of the public. Such a compilation would perhaps have been more judicious, though I confess it would have afforded less variety. The priests and the monks of earlier, and the doctors of later days, who have signalized themselves by nothing but a controversial pamphlet, long since thrown by, and never to be perused again, might have been forgotten, without injury or loss to the national character for learning or genius. This observation suggested to me the following lines, which may serve to illustrate my meaning, and at the same time to give my criticism a sprightlier air.

> Oh fond attempt, to give a deathless lot
> To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
> In vain, recorded in historic page,
> They court the notice of a future age;
> Those twinkling, tiny lustres of the land
> Drop one by one, from Fame's neglecting hand;
> Lethean gulfs receive them as they fall,
> And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.

So when a child (as playful children use)
Has burnt to cinder a stale last-year's news,
The flame extinct, he views the roving fire,
There goes my lady, and there goes the squire,
There goes the parson—O illustrious spark!
And there—scarce less illustrious—goes the clerk!

Virgil admits none but worthies into the Elysian Fields; I cannot recollect the lines in which he describes them all, but these in particular I well remember—

Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo,
Inventas aut qui vitam excoluêre per artes.

A chaste and scrupulous conduct like his would well become the writer of national biography. But enough of this.

Our respects attend Miss Shuttleworth, with many thanks for her intended present. Some purses derive all their value from their contents, but these will have an intrinsic value of their own: and though mine should be often empty, which is not an improbable supposition, I shall still esteem it highly on its own account.

If you could meet with a second-hand Virgil, ditto Homer, both Iliad and Odyssey, together with a Clavis, for I have no Lexicon, and all tolerably cheap, I shall be obliged to you if you will make the purchase.—
Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Sept. 7, 1780.

My dear Friend—As many gentlemen as there are in the world, who have children, and heads capable of reflecting on the important subject of their education, so many opinions there are about it; many of them just and sensible, though almost all differing from each other. With respect to the education of boys, I think they are generally made to draw in Latin and Greek trammels too soon. It is pleasing, no doubt, to a parent, to see his child already in some sort a proficient in those languages, at an age when most others are entirely ignorant of them; but hence it often happens,

that a boy, who would construe a fable in Aesop at six or seven years of age, having exhausted his little stock of attention and diligence in making that notable acquisition, grows weary of his task, conceives a dislike for study, and perhaps makes but a very indifferent progress afterwards. The mind and the body have in this respect a striking resemblance of each other. In childhood they are both nimble, but not strong; they can skip and frisk about with wonderful agility, but hard labour spoils them both. In maturer years they become less active, but more vigorous, more capable of a fixed application, and can make themselves sport with that which a little earlier would have affected them with intolerable fatigue. I should recommend it to you therefore (but after all you must judge for yourself), to allot the two next years of little John's scholarship to writing and arithmetic, together with which, for variety's sake, and because it is capable of being formed into an amusement, I would mingle geography, a science (which, if not attended to betimes, is seldom made an object of much consideration) essentially necessary to the accomplishment of a gentleman, yet (as I know by sad experience) imperfectly, if at all, inculcated in the schools. Lord Spencer's son, when he was four years of age, knew the situation of every kingdom, country, city, river, and remarkable mountain in the world. For this attainment, which I suppose his father had never made, he was indebted to a plaything; having been accustomed to amuse himself with those maps which are cut into several compartments, so as to be thrown into a heap of confusion, that they may be put together again with an exact coincidence of all their angles and bearings, so as to form a perfect whole.

If he begins Latin and Greek at eight, or even at nine years of age, it is surely soon enough. Seven years, the usual allowance for those acquisitions, are more than sufficient for the purpose, especially with his readiness in learning; for you would hardly wish to have him qualified for the university before fifteen,

a period, in my mind, much too early for it, and when he could hardly be trusted there without the utmost danger to his morals. Upon the whole, you will perceive that in my judgement the difficulty, as well as the wisdom, consists more in bridling in, and keeping back, a boy of his parts, than in pushing him forward. If, therefore, at the end of the two next years, instead of putting a grammar into his hand, you should allow him to amuse himself with some agreeable writers upon the subject of natural philosophy for another year, I think it would answer well. There is a book called Cosmo-theoria Puerilis, there are Derham's Physico-, and Astro-theology, together with several others, in the same manner, very intelligible even to a child, and full of useful instruction.

Plums and pears in my next. W. C.

To Mrs. Newton

Oct. 5, 1780.

Dear Madam—When a lady speaks, it is not civil to make her wait a week for an answer.—I received your letter within this hour, and, foreseeing that the garden will engross much of my time for some days to come, have seized the present opportunity to acknowledge it. I congratulate you on Mr. Newton's safe arrival at Ramsgate, making no doubt but that he reached the place without difficulty or danger, the road thither from Canterbury being so good as to afford room for neither. He has now a view of the element, with which he was once so familiar, but which I think he has not seen for many years. The sight of his old acquaintance will revive in his mind a pleasing recollection of past deliverances, and when he looks at him from the beach, he may say—'You have formerly given me trouble enough, but I have cast anchor now where your billows can never reach me.'—It is happy for him that he can say so. . . . Our love attends you.—Yours, dear madam,

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 9, 1780.

I wrote the following last summer. The tragical occasion of it really happened at the next house to ours. I am glad when I can find a subject to work upon; a lapidary I suppose accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone; but it is my amusement, and if after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains.[1]

I shall charge you a half penny a-piece for every copy I send you, the short as well as the long. This is a sort of afterclap you little expected, but I cannot possibly afford them at a cheaper rate. If this method of raising money had occurred to me sooner, I should have made the bargain sooner; but am glad I have hit upon it at last. It will be a considerable encouragement to my muse, and act as a powerful stimulus to my industry. If the American war should last much longer, I may be obliged to raise my price; but this I shall not do without a real occasion for it:—it depends much upon Lord North's pretty conduct in the article of supplies. If he imposes an additional tax on anything that I deal in, the necessity of this measure, on my part, will be so apparent, that I dare say you will not dispute it. . . . W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Dec. 1780.

My dear Friend—Poetical reports of law cases are not very common, yet it seems to me desirable that they should be so. Many advantages would accrue from such a measure. They would in the first place be more commodiously deposited in the memory, just as linen, grocery, or other such matters, when neatly

[1] Verses on a Goldfinch starved to death in a cage.

packed, are known to occupy less room, and to lie more conveniently in any trunk, chest, or box, to which they may be committed. In the next place, being divested of that infinite circumlocution, and the endless embarrassment in which they are involved by it, they would become surprisingly intelligible, in comparison with their present obscurity. And lastly, they would by this means be rendered susceptible of musical embellishment, and instead of being quoted in the courts, with that dull monotony, which is so wearisome to bystanders, and frequently lulls even the judges themselves to sleep, might be rehearsed in recitative; which would have an admirable effect, in keeping the attention fixed and lively, and could not fail to disperse that heavy atmosphere of sadness and gravity, which hangs over the jurisprudence of our country. I remember, many years ago, being informed by a relation of mine, who in his youth had applied himself to the study of the law, that one of his fellow-students, a gentleman of sprightly parts, and very respectable talents of the poetical kind, did actually engage in the prosecution of such a design; for reasons I suppose somewhat similar to, if not the same with those I have now suggested. He began with Coke's Institutes; a book so rugged in its style, that an attempt to polish it seemed an Herculean labour, and not less arduous and difficult, than it would be to give the smoothness of a rabbit's fur to the prickly back of a hedgehog. But he succeeded to admiration, as you will perceive by the following specimen, which is all that my said relation could recollect of the performance.

Tenant in fee
Simple, is he,
And need neither quake nor quiver,
Who hath his lands,
Free from all demands,
To him and his heirs for ever.

You have an ear for music, and a taste for verse, which saves me the trouble of pointing out with a critical nicety the advantages of such a version. I proceed therefore to what I at first intended, and

to transcribe the record of an adjudged case thus managed, to which indeed what I have premised was intended merely as an introduction.[1] W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Feb. 6, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . I give you joy of your own hair. No doubt you are a considerable gainer in your appearance by being disperiwigged. The best wig is that which most resembles the natural hair; why then should he that has hair enough of his own, have recourse to imitation? I have little doubt, but that if an arm or a leg could have been taken off with as little pain as attends the amputation of a curl or a lock of hair, the natural limb would have been thought less becoming, or less convenient, by some men, than a wooden one, and been disposed of accordingly.

Thanks for the salmon, it was perfectly good, as were the two lobsters; and the two guineas came safe. Having some verses to transcribe, and being rather weary, I add no more, except our love to the whole family, jointly and severally. Having begun my letter with a miserable pen, I was not willing to change it for a better lest my writing should not be all of a piece, but it has worn me and my patience quite out.—Yours ever, Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. John Newton

Feb. 18, 1781.

My dear Friend—I send you *Table Talk*. It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take

[1] This letter concluded with the poetical law case of 'Nose, plaintiff—Eyes, defendants.'—Southey.

the opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favour of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweet-meat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act: one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any, and the next, to clap a spur to the sides of it: now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dullness. If this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know not what is; and if any man doubt it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary, I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker colour, without one bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other, as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed. . . .

You had been married thirty-one years last Monday. When you married I was eighteen years of age, and had just left Westminster school. At that time, I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride, and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life, than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure, as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent in painting a piece of wood, that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed*: I found myself in possession of many baubles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures. Then I learned the truth, and

then I lost it; and there ends my history. I would no more than you wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason. He that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot, would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey.—Yours, my dear Sir, with our joint love, W. C.

To Mrs. Hill

Feb. 19, 1781.

Dear Madam—When a man, especially a man that lives altogether in the country, undertakes to write to a lady he never saw, he is the awkwardest creature in the world. He begins his letter under the same sensations he would have, if he were to accost her in person, only with this difference,—that he may take as much time as he pleases, for consideration, and need not write a single word that he has not well weighed and pondered beforehand, much less a sentence that he does not think supereminently clever. In every other respect, whether he be engaged in an interview, or in a letter, his behaviour is, for the most part, equally constrained and unnatural. He resolves, as they say, to set the best leg foremost, which often proves to be what Hudibras calls—

> Not that of bone,
> But much its better—th' wooden one.

His extraordinary effort only serves, as in the case of that hero, to throw him on the other side of his horse; and he owes his want of success, if not to absolute stupidity, to his most earnest endeavour to secure it.

Now I do assure you, Madam, that all these sprightly effusions of mine stand entirely clear of the charge of premeditation, and that I never entered upon a business of this kind with more simplicity in my life. I determined, before I began, to lay aside all attempts of the kind I have just mentioned; and being perfectly free from the fetters that self-conceit, commonly called

bashfulness, fastens upon the mind, am, as you see, surprisingly brilliant.

My principal design is to thank you in the plainest terms, which always afford the best proof of a man's sincerity, for your obliging present. The seeds will make a figure hereafter in the stove of a much greater man than myself, who am a little man, with no stove at all. Some of them, however, I shall raise for my own amusement, and keep them, as long as they can be kept, in a bark heat, which I give them all the year; and in exchange for those I part with, I shall receive such exotics as are not too delicate for a green-house.

I will not omit to tell you, what, no doubt, you have heard already, though, perhaps, you have never made the experiment, that leaves gathered at the fall are found to hold their heat much longer than bark, and are preferable in every respect. Next year I intend to use them myself. I mention it because Mr. Hill told me, some time since, that he was building a stove, in which, I suppose, they will succeed much better than in a frame.

I beg to thank you again, Madam, for the very fine salmon you was so kind as to favour me with, which has all the sweetness of a Hertfordshire trout, and resembles it so much in flavour, that, blindfold, I should not have known the difference.

I beg, Madam, you will accept all these thanks, and believe them as sincere as they really are. Mr. Hill knows me well enough to be able to vouch for me, that I am not over-much addicted to compliments and fine speeches; nor do I mean either the one or the other, when I assure you that I am, dear Madam, not merely for his sake, but your own, your most obedient and affectionate servant, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Feb. 27, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . Alas, poor Vestris! what a pitiable object, how truly French in his humiliation,

when he bowed his head down to the stage and held it there, as if he never meant to raise it more! As humble in his abasement as exalted in his capers, equally French in both. Which is most entitled to compassion, the dancer who is obliged, at the expense of all that is called dignity in man, to stoop to the arbitrary requisitions of an enraged assembly, or that assembly themselves who think it worth their while to spend hours in bellowing for satisfaction from the concessions of a dancer? Considering that life does not last for ages, and they know it, it is not unreasonable to say, that both he and they might set a higher value upon their time, and devote it to a better purpose. It is possible, too, you may think that the maker of this wise reflection might himself have been better employed than in writing what follows upon the subject. I subscribe to the truth of the animadversion, and can only say, in my excuse, that the composition is short, did not cost me much time, and may perhaps provoke a longer, which is not always useless. If you please you may send it to the Poet's Corner.

A CARD

Poor Vestris, grieved beyond all measure,
To have incurred so much displeasure;
Although a Frenchman, disconcerted,
And though light heeled, yet heavy hearted,
Begs humbly to inform his friends,
Next first of April, he intends
To take a boat and row right down
To Cuckolds' point, from Richmond town;
And as he goes, alert and gay,
Leap all the bridges in his way;
The boat borne downward with the tide,
Shall catch him safe on t'other side:
He humbly hopes by this expedient,
To prove himself their most obedient
(Which shall be always his endeavour),
And jump into their former favour.

. . . We thank you for the intended salmon, and beg you would get yourself made Bishop of Chichester as soon as possible, that we may have to thank you for

every kind of eatable fish the British coast produces.—Yours ever, WM. COWPER.

I have hurried to the end as fast as possible, being weary of a letter that is one continued blot.

To the Rev. John Newton

March 18, 1781.

My dear Friend—A slight disorder in my larboard eye may possibly prevent my writing to you a long letter, and would perhaps have prevented my writing at all, if I had not known that you account a fortnight's silence a week too long. . . .

If a Board of Inquiry were to be established, at which poets were to undergo an examination respecting the motives that induced them to publish, and I were to be summoned to attend, that I might give an account of mine, I think I could truly say, what perhaps few poets could, that though I have no objection to lucrative consequences, if any such should follow, they are not my aim; much less is it my ambition to exhibit myself to the world as a genius. What then, says Mr. President, can possibly be your motive? I answer, with a bow—Amusement. There is nothing but this—no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, Poetry excepted—that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts, which, when I am not thus employed, are for ever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not interest myself sufficiently in my own success, to make an amusement of it. . . .—Yours, my dear friend, WM. COWPER.

To the Rev. William Unwin

April 2, 1781.

My dear Friend—Fine weather, and a variety of *extraforaneous* occupations (search Johnson's dictionary

for that word, and if not found there, insert it—for it saves a deal of circumlocution, and is very lawfully compounded) make it difficult (excuse the length of a parenthesis, which I did not foresee the length of when I began it, and which may perhaps a little perplex the sense of what I am writing, though, as I seldom deal in that figure of speech, I have the less need to make an apology for doing it at present), make it difficult (I say) for me to find opportunities for writing. My morning is engrossed by the garden; and in the afternoon, till I have drunk tea, I am fit for nothing. At five o'clock we walk; and when the walk is over, lassitude recommends rest, and again I become fit for nothing. The current hour therefore which (I need not tell you) is comprised in the interval between four and five, is devoted to your service, as the only one in the twenty-four which is not otherwise engaged.

I do not wonder that you have felt a great deal upon the occasion you mention in your last, especially on account of the asperity you have met with in the behaviour of your friend. Reflect however that as it is natural to you to have very fine feelings, it is equally natural to some other tempers, to leave those feelings entirely out of the question, and to speak to you, and to act towards you, just as they do towards the rest of mankind, without the least attention to the irritability of your system. Men of a rough and unsparing address should take great care that they be always in the right; the justness and propriety of their sentiments and censures being the only tolerable apology that can be made for such a conduct, especially in a country where civility of behaviour is inculcated even from the cradle. But in the instance now under our contemplation I think you a sufferer under the weight of an animadversion not founded in truth, and which, consequently, you did not deserve. I account him faithful in the pulpit, who dissembles nothing that he believes, for fear of giving offence. To accommodate a discourse to the judgement and opinion of others, for the sake of pleasing them, though by doing so we are obliged to depart

widely from our own, is to be unfaithful to ourselves at least, and cannot be accounted fidelity to him whom we profess to serve. But there are few men who do not stand in need of the exercise of charity and forbearance; and the gentleman in question has afforded you an ample opportunity in this respect, to show how readily, though differing in your views, you can practise all that he could possibly expect from you, if your persuasion corresponded exactly with his own.

With respect to *Monsieur le Curé*, I think you not quite excusable for suffering such a man to give you any uneasiness at all. The grossness and injustice of his demand ought to be its own antidote. If a robber should miscall you a pitiful fellow for not carrying a purse full of gold about you, would his brutality give you any concern? I suppose not. Why then have you been distressed in the present instance?—Yours,

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

May 1, 1781.

Your mother says I *must* write, and *must* admits of no apology; I might otherwise plead, that I have nothing to say, that I am weary, that I am dull, that it would be more convenient therefore for you, as well as for myself, that I should let it alone; but all these pleas, and whatever pleas besides either disinclination, indolence, or necessity might suggest, are overruled, as they ought to be, the moment a lady adduces her irrefragable argument, *you must*. You have still however one comfort left, that what I must write, you may, or may not read, just as it shall please you; unless Lady Anne at your elbow should say, you *must* read it, and then like a true knight you will obey without looking out for a remedy.

I do not love to harp upon strings that, to say the least, are not so musical as one would wish. But you I know have many a time sacrificed your own feelings to those of others, and where an act of charity leads

you, are not easily put out of your way. This consideration encourages me just to insinuate that your silence on the subject of a certain nomination is distressful to more than you would wish, in particular to the little boy whose clothes are outgrown and worn out; and to his mother, who is unwilling to furnish him with a new suit, having reason to suppose that the long blue petticoat would soon supersede it, if she should.

In the press, and speedily will be published, in one volume octavo, price three shillings, Poems, by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq. You may suppose, by the size of the publication, that the greatest part of them have been long kept secret, because you yourself have never seen them: but the truth is, that they are most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. Two-thirds of the compilation will be occupied by four pieces, the first of which sprung up in the month of December, and the last of them in the month of March. They contain, I suppose, in all, about two thousand and five hundred lines: are known, or to be known in due time, by the names of *Table Talk—The Progress of Error—Truth—Expostulation.* Mr. Newton writes a Preface, and Johnson is the publisher. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you, till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing), has been this; that till within these few days, I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them; and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine, to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks, whether any bookseller would be willing to subject himself to an ambiguity, that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and takes the whole charge upon himself. So out I come. I

shall be glad of my Translations from Vincent Bourne, in your next frank. My Muse will lay herself at your feet immediately on her first public appearance.—Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

May 9, 1781.

My dear Sir—I am in the press, and it is in vain to deny it. But how mysterious is the conveyance of intelligence from one end to the other of your great city!—Not many days since, except one man, and he but a little taller than yourself, all London was ignorant of it; for I do not suppose that the public prints have yet announced this most agreeable tidings, the title-page, which is the basis of the advertisement, having so lately reached the publisher; and now it is known to you, who live at least two miles distant from my confidant upon the occasion.

My labours are principally the production of the last winter; all indeed, except a few of the minor pieces. When I can find no other occupation, I think, and when I think, I am very apt to do it in rhyme. Hence it comes to pass that the season of the year which generally pinches off the flowers of poetry, unfolds mine, such as they are, and crowns me with a winter garland. In this respect, therefore, I and my contemporary bards are by no means upon a par. They write when the delightful influences of fine weather, fine prospects, and a brisk motion of the animal spirits, make poetry almost the language of nature; and I, when icicles depend from all the leaves of the Parnassian laurel, and when a reasonable man would as little expect to succeed in verse, as to hear a blackbird whistle. This must be my apology to you for whatever want of fire and animation you may observe in what you will shortly have the perusal of. As to the public, if they like me not, there is no remedy. A friend will weigh and consider all disadvantages, and make as large allowances as an author can wish, and larger perhaps than he has any

right to expect; but not so the world at large; whatever they do not like, they will not by any apology be persuaded to forgive, and it would be in vain to tell *them*, that I wrote my verses in January, for they would immediately reply, 'Why did not you write them in May?' A question that might puzzle a wiser head than we poets are generally blessed with. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

May 23, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much more the writer! Your desire to see my muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast, blown through every newspaper, would have said—'The poet is coming!'—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return, that is to say, not till next winter. . . .

My neckcloths being all worn out, I intend to wear stocks, but not unless they are more fashionable than the former. In that case, I shall be obliged to you if you will buy me a handsome stock-buckle, for a very little money; for twenty or twenty-five shillings perhaps a second-hand affair may be purchased that will make a figure at Olney.

I am much obliged to you for your offer to support me in a translation of Bourne. It is but seldom, however, and never except for my amusement, that I translate, because I find it disagreeable to work by another man's pattern; I should at least be sure to find it so in

a business of any length. Again, *that* is epigrammatic and witty in Latin, which would be perfectly insipid in English; and a translator of Bourne would frequently find himself obliged to supply what is called the turn, which is in fact the most difficult, and the most expensive part of the whole composition, and could not perhaps, in many instances, be done with any tolerable success. If a Latin poem is neat, elegant, and musical, it is enough; but English readers are not so easily satisfied. To quote myself, you will find, in comparing the Jackdaw with the original, that I was obliged to sharpen a point which, though smart enough in the Latin, would, in English, have appeared as plain, and as blunt, as the tag of a lace. I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in *his* way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to *him*. I love him too with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster, when I passed through it. He was so good-natured, and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him; for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. His humour is entirely original; he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all this drollery there is a mixture of rational, and even religious, reflection at times: and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him, in my mind, one of the most amiable writers in the world. It is not common to meet with an author who can make you smile, and yet at nobody's expense; who is always entertaining, and yet always harmless; and who, though always elegant, and classical to a degree not always found even in the classics themselves, charms more by the simplicity and playfulness of his ideas, than by the neatness and purity of

his verse; yet such was poor Vinny. I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks, and box his ears to put it out again. . . .—Yours affectionately, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

May, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . This fine weather I suppose sets you on horseback, and allures the ladies into the garden. If I was at Stock, I should be of their party; and while they sat knotting or netting in the shade, should comfort myself with the thought, that I had not a beast under me, whose walk would seem tedious, whose trot would jumble me, and whose gallop might throw me into a ditch. What nature expressly designed me for I have never been able to conjecture; I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind. When I was a boy, I excelled at cricket and football, but the fame I acquired by achievements in that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in anything since. I am sure however that she did not design me for a horseman; and that, if all men were of my mind, there would be an end of all jockeyship for ever. I am rather straitened in time, and not very rich in materials, therefore, with our joint love to you all, conclude myself,—Yours ever, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

June 5, 1781.

My dear Friend—If the old adage be true, that 'he gives twice, who gives speedily,' it is equally true, that he who not only uses expedition in giving, but gives more than was asked, gives thrice at least. Such is the style in which Mr. Smith confers a favour. He has not only sent me franks to Johnson, but, under

another cover, has added six to you. These last, for aught that appears by your letter, he threw in of his own mere bounty. I beg that my share of thanks may not be wanting on this occasion, and that when you write to him next you will assure him of the sense I have of the obligation, which is the more flattering, as it includes a proof of his predilection in favour of the poems his franks are destined to enclose. May they not forfeit his good opinion hereafter, nor yours, to whom I hold myself indebted in the first place, and who have equally given me credit for their deservings! Your mother says, that although there are passages in them containing opinions which will not be universally subscribed to, the world will at least allow—what my great modesty will not permit me to subjoin. I have the highest opinion of her judgement, and know, by having experienced the soundness of them, that her observations are always worthy of attention and regard. Yet, strange as it may seem, I do not feel the vanity of an author, when she commends me;—but I feel something better, a spur to my diligence, and a cordial to my spirits, both together animating me to deserve, at least not to fall short of, her expectations. For I verily believe, if my dullness should earn me the character of a dunce, the censure would affect her more than me; not that I am insensible of the value of a good name, either as a man or an author. Without an ambition to attain it, it is absolutely unattainable under either of those descriptions. But my life having been in many respects a series of mortifications and disappointments, I am become less apprehensive and impressible perhaps in some points, than I should otherwise have been; and though I should be exquisitely sorry to disgrace my friends, could endure my own share of the affliction with a reasonable measure of tranquillity.

These seasonable showers have poured floods upon all the neighbouring parishes, but have passed us by. My garden languishes, and, what is worse, the fields too languish, and the upland grass is burnt. These

discriminations are not fortuitous. But if they are providential, what do they import? I can only answer, as a friend of mine once answered a mathematical question in the schools—'*Prorsùs nescio.*' Perhaps it is, that men, who will not believe what they cannot understand, may learn the folly of their conduct, while their very senses are made to witness against them; and themselves in the course of Providence become the subjects of a thousand dispensations they cannot explain. But the end is never answered. The lesson is inculcated indeed frequently enough, but nobody learns it. Well. Instruction vouchsafed in vain is (I suppose) a debt to be accounted for hereafter. You must understand this to be a soliloquy. I wrote my thoughts without recollecting that I was writing a letter, and to you. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

June 24, 1781.

My dear Friend—The letter you withheld so long, lest it should give me pain, gave me pleasure. Horace says, the poets are a waspish race; and from my own experience of the temper of two or three, with whom I was formerly connected, I can readily subscribe to the character he gives them. But for my own part, I have never yet felt that excessive irritability, which some writers discover, when a friend, in the words of Pope,

> Just hints a fault, or hesitates dislike.

Least of all would I give way to such an unseasonable ebullition, merely because a civil question is proposed to me with much gentleness, and by a man whose concern for my credit and character I verily believe to be sincere. . . .

I remember a line in the *Odyssey*, which, literally translated, imports that there is nothing in the world more impudent than the belly. But had Homer met with an instance of modesty like yours, he would either

have suppressed that observation, or at least have qualified it with an exception. I hope that, for the future, Mrs. Unwin will never suffer you to go to London, without putting some victuals in your pocket; for what a strange article would it make in a newspaper, that a tall, well-dressed gentleman, by his appearance a clergyman, and with a purse of gold in his pocket, was found starved to death in the street! How would it puzzle conjecture, to account for such a phenomenon! Some would suppose that you had been kidnapped, like Betty Canning, of hungry memory; others would say, the gentleman was a Methodist, and had practised a rigorous self-denial, which had unhappily proved too hard for his constitution; but I will venture to say that nobody would divine the real cause, or suspect for a moment that your modesty had occasioned the tragedy in question. By the way, is it not possible, that the spareness and slenderness of your person may be owing to the same cause? for surely it is reasonable to suspect, that the bashfulness which could prevail against you, on so trying an occasion, may be equally prevalent on others. I remember having been told by Colman, that when he once dined with Garrick, he repeatedly pressed him to eat more of a certain dish, that he was known to be particularly fond of; Colman as often refused, and at last declared he could not: 'But could not you,' says Garrick, 'if you was in a dark closet by yourself?' The same question might perhaps be put to you, with as much, or more propriety; and therefore I recommend it to you, either to furnish yourself with a little more assurance, or always to eat in the dark. . . .—Yours, *ut semper*,

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

July 7, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . Whoever means to take my phiz will find himself sorely perplexed in seeking for a fit occasion. That I shall not give him one is

certain; and if he steals one, he must be as cunning and quick-sighted a thief as Autolycus himself. His best course will be to draw a face, and call it mine, at a venture. They who have not seen me these twenty years will say, It may possibly be a striking likeness now, though it bears no resemblance to what he was: time makes great alterations. They who know me better will say perhaps, Though it is not perfectly the thing, yet there is somewhat of the cast of his countenance. If the nose was a little longer, and the chin a little shorter, the eyes a little smaller, and the forehead a little more protuberant, it would be just the man. And thus, without seeing me at all, the artist may represent me to the public eye, with as much exactness as yours has bestowed upon you, though, I suppose, the original was full in his view when he made the attempt. . . .—Yours, my dear Sir,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. John Newton

July 12, 1781.

My very dear Friend—I am going to send, what when you have read, you may scratch your head, and say, I suppose, there's nobody knows, whether what I have got, be verse or not: by the tune and the time, it ought to be rhyme; but if it be, did you ever see, of late or of yore, such a ditty before? The thought did occur, to me and to her, as Madam and I, did walk and not fly, over hills and dales, with spreading sails, before it was dark, to Weston Park.

The news at *Oney* is little or noney, but such as it is, I send it, viz. Poor Mr. Peace cannot yet cease, addling his head with what you said, and has left parish-church quite in the lurch, having almost swore to go there no more.

Page and his wife, that made such a strife, we met them twain in Dog Lane; we gave them the wall, and that was all. For Mr. Scott, we have seen him not,

except as he pass'd, in a wonderful haste, to see a friend in Silver End. Mrs. Jones proposes, ere July closes, that she and her sister, and her Jones Mister, and we that are here, our course shall steer to dine in the Spinney; but for a guinea, if the weather should hold, so hot and so cold, we had better by far stay where we are. For the grass there grows, while nobody mows (which is very wrong), so rank and long, that so to speak, 'tis at least a week, if it happens to rain, ere it dries again.

I have writ Charity, not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good; and if the Reviewer should say 'to be sure, the gentleman's Muse, wears Methodist shoes; you may know by her pace, and talk about grace, that she and her bard have little regard, for the taste and fashions, and ruling passions, and hoydening play, of the modern day; and though she assume a borrowed plume, and now and then wear a tittering air, 'tis only her plan, to catch if she can, the giddy and gay, as they go that way, by a production on a new construction. She has baited her trap in hopes to snap all that may come, with a sugar-plum.'—— His opinion in this, will not be amiss; 'tis what I intend, my principal end; and if I succeed, and folks should read, till a few are brought to a serious thought, I shall think I am paid, for all I have said, and all I have done, though I have run, many a time, after a rhyme, as far as from hence, to the end of my sense, and by hook or crook, write another book, if I live and am here, another year.

I have heard before, of a room with a floor, laid upon springs, and such like things, with so much art, in every part, that when you went in, you was forced to begin a minuet pace, with an air and a grace, swimming about, now in and now out, with a deal of state, in a figure of eight, without pipe or string, or any such thing; and now I have writ, in a rhyming fit, what will make you dance, and as you advance, will keep you still, though against your will, dancing away, alert and gay, till you come to an end of what I

have penn'd; which that you may do, ere Madam and you are quite worn out with jigging about, I take my leave, and here you receive a bow profound, down to the ground, from your humble me—— W. C.

P.S.—When I concluded, doubtless you did think me right, as well you might, in saying what I said of Scott; and then it was true, but now it is due, to him to note, that since I wrote, himself and he has visited we.

To the Rev. John Newton

July 22, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . Our excursion to the Spinney, which I mentioned in the hop o' my thumb lines I sent you, took place yesterday. The weather was just such as it would have been if we had had the choice of it; perhaps better; for of all things in the world we find it sometimes most difficult to please ourselves. We dined in the root-house. Our great wheelbarrow, which may be called a first-rate in its kind, conveyed all our stores, and afterwards, with the assistance of a board laid over it, made us a very good table. We set off at one, and were at home again soon after eight. I never made one in a party of pleasure that answered so well. We separated before we grew weary of each other, which is a happiness seldom enjoyed upon such occasions; we were seven in company, including Hannah, who, though highly delighted with her jaunt, was not at all more pleased than her elders. She is as much delighted to-day with the acquisition of a sister born last night, but whether the rest of that noble family will have equal cause to rejoice in the event, is uncertain. Should she be followed by a troop, unless they practise Dean Swift's recommended method for the maintenance of the poor, it is not easy to say where they will find victuals, certainly not at Olney. . .

Thanks for the cocoa-nuts and the slide. Mrs.

Unwin joins love to both. The summer being so far advanced,

She and her sublimity
Will do without dimity.

Yours, my dear Sir, and Mrs. Newton's. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

July 29, 1781.

My dear Friend—Having given the case you laid before me in your last all due consideration, I proceed to answer it; and in order to clear my way, shall, in the first place, set down my sense of those passages in Scripture which, on a hasty perusal, seem to clash with the opinion I am going to give—'If a man smite one cheek, turn the other'—'If he take thy cloak, let him take thy coat also.' That is, I suppose, rather than on a vindictive principle avail yourself of that remedy the law allows you, in the way of retaliation, for that was the subject immediately under the discussion of the speaker. Nothing is so contrary to the genius of the Gospel, as the gratification of resentment and revenge; but I cannot easily persuade myself to think, that the author of that dispensation could possibly advise his followers to consult their own peace at the expense of the peace of society, or inculcate a universal abstinence from the use of lawful remedies, to the encouragement of injury and oppression.

St. Paul again seems to condemn the practice of going to law, 'Why do ye not rather suffer wrong,' &c. But if we look again, we shall find that a litigious temper had obtained, and was prevalent among the professors of the day. This he condemned, and with good reason; it was unseemly to the last degree, that the disciples of the Prince of Peace should worry and vex each other with injurious treatment, and unnecessary disputes, to the scandal of their religion in the eyes of the heathen. But surely he did not mean any more than his Master, in the place above alluded to,

that the most harmless members of society should receive no advantage of its laws, or should be the only persons in the world who should derive no benefit from those institutions, without which society cannot subsist. Neither of them could mean to throw down the pale of property, and to lay the Christian part of the world open, throughout all ages, to the incursions of unlimited violence and wrong.

By this time you are sufficiently aware, that I think you have an indisputable right to recover at law what is so dishonestly withheld from you. The fellow, I suppose, has discernment enough to see a difference between you and the generality of the clergy, and cunning enough to conceive the purpose of turning your meekness and forbearance to good account, and of coining them into hard cash, which he means to put in his pocket. But I would disappoint him, and show him, that though a Christian is not to be quarrelsome, he is not to be crushed; and that though he is but a worm before God, he is not such a worm as every selfish unprincipled wretch may tread upon at his pleasure.

I lately heard a story from a lady, who has spent many years of her life in France, somewhat to the present purpose. An Abbé, universally esteemed for his piety, and especially for the meekness of his manners, had yet undesignedly given some offence to a shabby fellow in his parish. The man, concluding he might do as he pleased with so forgiving and gentle a character, struck him on one cheek, and bade him turn the other. The good man did so, and when he had received the two slaps, which he thought himself obliged to submit to, turned again, and beat him soundly. I do not wish to see you follow the French gentleman's example, but I believe nobody that has heard the story condemns him much for the spirit he showed upon the occasion.

I had the relation from Lady Austen, sister to Mrs. Jones, wife of the minister at Clifton. She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with

your mother and me; insomuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney. Yesterday se'nnight we all dined together in the *Spinney*—a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *Fête Champêtre*. A board laid over the top of the wheelbarrow served us for a table; our dining-room was a root-house lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock, the servants, who had dined under a great elm tree upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other: a happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of.—Yours, with our joint love, W. C.

To Mrs. Newton

Aug. 1781.

Dear Madam— . . . I thank you for your little abridgement of my family's history. Like everything that relates to the present world, in which there seems to be nearly an equal mixture of the lamentable and ridiculous, it affords both occasion to laugh and to cry. In this single instance of my uncle, I can see cause for both. He trembles upon the verge of fourscore: a white hat with a yellow lining is no indication of wisdom suitable to so great an age; he can go but one step farther in the road of impropriety, and direct his executor to bury him in it. He is a very little man, and had he lined his hat with pink instead of yellow, might have been gathered by a natural mistake for a mushroom, and sent off in a basket.

While the world lasts, fashion will continue to lead it by the nose. And, after all, what can fashion do for its most obsequious followers? It can ring the changes

upon the same things, and it can do no more. Whether our hats be white or black, our caps high or low,—whether we wear two watches or one, is of little consequence. There is indeed an appearance of variety; but the folly and vanity that dictates and adopts the change, are invariably the same. When the fashions of a particular period appear more reasonable than those of the preceding, it is not because the world is grown more reasonable than it was; but because, in a course of perpetual changes, some of them must sometimes happen to be for the better. Neither do I suppose the preposterous customs that prevail at present a proof of its greater folly. In a few years, perhaps next year, the fine gentleman will shut up his umbrella, and give it to his sister, filling his hand with a crab-tree cudgel instead of it: and when he has done so, will he be wiser than now? By no means. The love of change will have betrayed him into a propriety, which, in reality, he has no taste for, all his merit on the occasion amounting to no more than this—that, being weary of one plaything, he has taken up another. . . . —Yours, dear Madam, most affectionately,

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Aug. 16, 1781.

My dear Friend—I might date my letter from the greenhouse, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded, by an awning of mats which forbids him to shine anywhere except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep, where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children. Not to mention the exchange of a sweet-smelling

garden, for the putrid exhalations of Silver End. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many other occasions furnish an opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage, which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local; never once adverting to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of having all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possibly afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably burthensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel; who, in return, envies him as much his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situations, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar. These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an incumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety. He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance; and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other happiness than sensual gratification; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the

shortest notice, just such a recess as this; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, to the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that, humanly speaking, was a pledge and a security for the continuance of them all.

Thus I have sent you a schoolboy's theme. When I write to you, I do not write without thinking, but always without premeditation: the consequence is, that such thoughts as pass through my head when I am not writing, make the subject of my letters to you. . . .—Yours, my dear Sir, WM. COWPER.

To the Rev. John Newton

Aug. 21, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time; at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, however, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the greenhouse, as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses, above all others, as the place of her future residence. Next spring

twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine) she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan, on Mrs. Unwin's account, who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connexion, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the neighbourhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But these things are all at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene, and in two years not only this project, but all the projects in Europe may be disconcerted.

Cocoa-nut naught,
Fish too dear,
None must be bought
For us that are here.

So, dear madam, wait
Till fish can be got
At a reas'nable rate,
Whether lobster or not;

No lobster on earth,
That ever I saw,
To me would be worth
Sixpence a claw.

Till the French and the Dutch
Have quitted the seas,
And then send as much
And as oft as you please.

Yours, my dear Sir, W. C.

To Mrs. Newton

Sept. 16, 1781.

A noble theme demands a noble verse,
In such I thank you for your fine oys*ters*.
The barrel was magnificently large,
But being sent to Olney at free charge,
Was not inserted in the driver's list,
And therefore overlook'd, forgot, or miss'd;
For when the messenger whom we dispatch'd
Enquired for oysters, Hob his noddle scratch'd,
Denying that his wagon or his wain
Did any such commodity contain.
In consequence of which, your welcome boon
Did not arrive till yesterday at noon;
In consequence of which some chanced to die,
And some, though very sweet, were very dry.

Now Madam says (and what she says must still
Deserve attention, say she what she will),
That what we call the Diligence, be-case
It goes to London with a swifter pace,
Would better suit the carriage of your gift,
Returning downward with a pace as swift;
And therefore recommends it with this aim—
To save at least three days,—the price the same;
For though it will not carry or convey
For less than twelve pence, send whate'er you may,
For oysters bred upon the salt sea shore,
Pack'd in a barrel, they will charge no more.
News have I none that I can deign to write,
Save that it rain'd prodigiously last night;
And that ourselves were, at the seventh hour,
Caught in the first beginning of the shower;
But walking, running, and with much ado,
Got home—just time enough to be wet through.
Yet both are well, and wond'rous to be told,
Soused as we were, we yet have caught no cold;
And wishing just the same good hap to you,
We say, good Madam, and good Sir, Adieu!

To the Rev. John Newton

The Greenhouse, Sept. 18, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . I have no objection in the world to your conveying a copy[1] to Dr. Johnson; though I well know that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its ways into all companies, and spoil the sale. He writes, indeed, like a man that thinks a great deal, and that sometimes thinks religiously: but report informs me that he has been severe enough in his animadversions upon Dr. Watts, who was nevertheless, if I am in any degree a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless, indeed, for the most part, and inattentive too often to those niceties which constitute

[1] Of his Poems.

elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions, and masterly in his execution. Pope, I have heard, had placed him once in the *Dunciad*; but on being advised to read before he judged him, was convinced that he deserved other treatment, and thrust somebody's blockhead into the gap, whose name, consisting of a monosyllable, happened to fit it. Whatever faults, however, I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called *Creation*, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country), and my success will be secured.

I have often promised myself a laugh with you about your pipe, but have always forgotten it when I have been writing, and at present I am not much in a laughing humour. You will observe, however, for your comfort and the honour of that same pipe, that it hardly falls within the line of my censure. You never fumigate the ladies, or force them out of company; nor do you use it as an incentive to hard drinking. Your friends, indeed, have reason to complain that it frequently deprives them of the pleasure of your own conversation while it leads you either into your study or your garden; but in all other respects it is as innocent a pipe as can be. Smoke away, therefore; and remember that if one poet has condemned the practice, a better than he (the witty and elegant Hawkins Browne) has been warm in the praise of it.

Retirement grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors. Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning: now, I

generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen. It consists at present, I suppose, of between six and seven hundred; so that there are hopes of an end, and I dare say Johnson will give me time enough to finish it.

I nothing add but this—that still *I am*
Your most affectionate and humble

WILLIAM.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Sept. 26, 1781.

My dear Friend—I may, I suppose, congratulate you on your safe arrival at Brighthelmston; and am the better pleased with your design to close the summer there, because I am acquainted with the place, and, by the assistance of fancy, can without much difficulty join myself to the party, and partake with you in your amusements and excursions. It happened singularly enough, that just before I received your last, in which you apprise me of your intended journey, I had been writing upon the subject, having found occasion towards the close of my last poem, called *Retirement*, to take some notice of the modern passion for sea-side entertainments, and to direct to the means by which they might be made useful as well as agreeable. I think with you, that the most magnificent object under heaven is the great deep; and cannot but feel an unpolite species of astonishment, when I consider the multitudes that view it without emotion, and even without reflection. In all its various forms, it is an object of all others the most suited to affect us with lasting impressions of the awful Power that created and controls it. I am the less inclined to think this negligence excusable, because, at a time of life when I gave as little attention to religious subjects as almost any man, I yet remember that the waves would preach to me, and that in the midst of dissipation I had an ear to hear them. One of Shakespeare's characters says,—'I am never merry when I hear sweet music.' The

same effect that harmony seems to have had upon him, I have experienced from the sight and sound of the ocean, which have often composed my thoughts into a melancholy not unpleasing, nor without its use. So much for *Signor Nettuno*.

Lady Austen goes to London this day se'nnight. We have told her that you shall visit her; which is an enterprise you may engage in with the more alacrity, because as she loves everything that has any connexion with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. Add to this, that your own personal recommendations are by no means small, or such as a woman of her fine taste and discernment can possibly overlook. She has many features in her character which you will admire; but one, in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation, as is hardly to be found in any rank of life, and, if report say true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings she has the most, and the most harmless, vivacity you can imagine. In short, she is—what you will find her to be, upon half an hour's conversation with her; and when I hear you have a journey to town in contemplation, I will send you her address.

Your mother is well, and joins with me in wishing that you may spend your time agreeably upon the coast of Sussex.—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

October 6, 1781.

My dear Friend—What a world are you daily conversant with, which I have not seen these twenty years, and shall never see again! The arts of dissipation (I

suppose) are nowhere practised with more refinement or success than at the place of your present residence. By your account of it, it seems to be just what it was when I visited it, a scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, dressing, yawning, sleeping; the rooms perhaps more magnificent, because the proprietors are grown richer, but the manners and occupations of the company just the same. Though my life has long been like that of a recluse, I have not the temper of one, nor am I in the least an enemy to cheerfulness and good humour; but I cannot envy you your situation; I even feel myself constrained to prefer the silence of this nook, and the snug fireside in our own diminutive parlour, to all the splendour and gaiety of Brighton.

You ask me, how I feel on the occasion of my approaching publication. Perfectly at my ease. If I had not been pretty well assured beforehand that my tranquillity would be but little endangered by such a measure, I would never have engaged in it; for I cannot bear disturbance. I have had in view two principal objects; first, to amuse myself,—and secondly, to compass that point in such a manner, that others might possibly be the better for my amusement. If I have succeeded, it will give me pleasure; but if I have failed, I shall not be mortified to the degree that might perhaps be expected. I remember an old adage (though not where it is to be found), '*bene vixit, qui bene latuit*,' and if I had recollected it at the right time, it should have been the motto to my book. By the way, it will make an excellent one for *Retirement*, if you can but tell me whom to quote for it. The critics cannot deprive me of the pleasure I have in reflecting, that so far as my leisure has been employed in writing for the public, it has been conscientiously employed, and with a view to their advantage. There is nothing agreeable, to be sure, in being chronicled for a dunce; but I believe there lives not a man upon earth who would be less affected by it than myself.

With all this indifference to fame, which you know me too well to suppose me capable of affecting, I have taken the utmost pains to deserve it. This may appear a mystery or a paradox in practice, but it is true. I considered that the taste of the day is refined, and delicate to excess, and that to disgust the delicacy of taste, by a slovenly inattention to it, would be to forfeit at once all hope of being useful; and for this reason, though I have written more verse this last year than perhaps any man in England, I have finished, and polished, and touched, and retouched, with the utmost care. If after all I should be converted into waste paper, it may be my misfortune, but it will not be my fault. I shall bear it with the most perfect serenity.

I do not mean to give ——— a copy: he is a good-natured little man, and crows exactly like a cock, but knows no more of verse than the cock he imitates.

Whoever supposes that Lady Austen's fortune is precarious, is mistaken. I can assure you, upon the ground of the most circumstantial and authentic information, that it is both genteel and perfectly safe.—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Oct. 14, 1781.

My dear Friend—I would not willingly deprive you of any comfort, and therefore would wish you to comfort yourself as much as you can with a notion that you are a more bountiful correspondent than I. You will give me leave in the meantime, however, to assert to myself a share in the same species of consolation, and to enjoy the flattering recollection that I have sometimes written three letters to your one. I never knew a poet, except myself, who was punctual in anything, or to be depended on for the due discharge of any duty, except what he thought he owed to the Muses. The moment a man takes it into his foolish head that he has what the world calls Genius, he gives himself a discharge from the servile drudgery of all

friendly offices, and becomes good for nothing, except in the pursuit of his favourite employment. But I am not yet vain enough to think myself entitled to such self-conferred honours, and though I have sent much poetry to the press, or, at least, what I hope my readers will account such, am still as desirous as ever of a place in your heart, and to take all opportunities to convince you that you have still the same in mine. My attention to my poetical function has, I confess, a little interfered of late with my other employments, and occasioned my writing less frequently than I should have otherwise done. But it is over, at least for the present, and I think for some time to come. . . . Yours, my dear Sir, and Mrs. Newton's,

Wm. Cowper.

To Mrs. Cowper

Oct. 19, 1781.

My dear Cousin—Your fear lest I should think you unworthy of my correspondence, on account of your delay to answer, may change sides now, and more properly belongs to me. It is long since I received your last, and yet I believe I can say truly, that not a post has gone by me since the receipt of it that has not reminded me of the debt I owe you, for your obliging and unreserved communications both in prose and verse, especially for the latter, because I consider them as marks of your peculiar confidence. The truth is, I have been such a verse-maker myself, and so busy in preparing a volume for the press, which I imagine will make its appearance in the course of the winter, that I hardly had leisure to listen to the calls of any other engagement. It is however finished, and gone to the printer's, and I have nothing now to do with it, but to correct the sheets as they are sent to me, and consign it over to the judgement of the public. It is a bold undertaking at this time of day, when so many writers of the greatest abilities have gone before, who seem to have anticipated every valuable subject, as well as all the graces of poetical embellishment, to

step forth into the world in the character of a bard, especially when it is considered that luxury, idleness, and vice, have debauched the public taste, and that nothing hardly is welcome but childish fiction, or what has at least a tendency to excite a laugh. I thought, however, that I had stumbled upon some subjects, that had never before been poetically treated, and upon some others, to which I imagined it would not be difficult to give an air of novelty by the manner of treating them. My sole drift is to be useful; a point which however I knew I should in vain aim at, unless I could be likewise entertaining. I have therefore fixed these two strings upon my bow, and by the help of both have done my best to send my arrow to the mark. My readers will hardly have begun to laugh, before they will be called upon to correct that levity, and peruse me with a more serious air. As to the effect, I leave it alone in His hands, who can alone produce it: neither prose nor verse can reform the manners of a dissolute age, much less can they inspire a sense of religious obligation, unless assisted and made efficacious by the power who superintends the truth he has vouchsafed to impart. . . . W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 24, 1781.

My dear Friend—News is always acceptable, especially from another world. I cannot tell you what has been done in the Chesapeake, but I can tell you what has passed at West Wycombe, in this county. Do you feel yourself disposed to give credit to the story of an apparition? No, say you. I am of your mind. I do not believe more than one in a hundred of those tales with which old women frighten children, and teach children to frighten each other. But you are not such a philosopher, I suppose, as to have persuaded yourself that an apparition is an impossible thing. You can attend to a story of that sort, if well authenticated? Yes. Then I can tell you one.

You have heard, no doubt, of the romantic friendship that subsisted once between Paul Whitehead and Lord le Despenser, the late Sir Francis Dashwood.—When Paul died, he left his lordship a legacy. It was his heart, which was taken out of his body, and sent as directed. His friend having built a church, and at that time just finished it, used it as a mausoleum upon this occasion; and having (as I think the newspapers told us at the time) erected an elegant pillar in the centre of it, on the summit of this pillar, enclosed in a golden urn, he placed the heart in question. But not as a lady places a china figure upon her mantel-tree, or on the top of her cabinet, but with much respectful ceremony, and all the forms of funeral solemnity. He hired the best singers and best performers. He composed an anthem for the purpose, he invited all the nobility and gentry in the country to assist at the celebration of these obsequies, and having formed them all into an august procession, marched to the place appointed at their head, and consigned the posthumous treasure, with his own hands, to its state of honourable elevation. Having thus, as he thought (and as he might well think, for it seems they were both renowned for their infidelity, and if they had any religion at all were pagans), appeased the manes of the deceased, he rested satisfied with what he had done, and supposed his friend would rest. But not so;—about a week since, I received a letter from a person, who cannot have been misinformed, telling me that Paul has appeared frequently of late to his Lordship, who labours under a complication of distempers,—that it is supposed the shock he has suffered from such unexpected visits will make his recovery, which was before improbable, impossible. Nor is this all: to ascertain the fact, and to put it out of the power of scepticism to argue away the reality of it, there are few, if any, of his lordship's numerous household, who have not likewise seen him, sometimes in the park, sometimes in the garden, as well as in the house, by day and by night, indifferently. I make no reflections upon this

incident, having other things to write about, and but little room.

I am much indebted to Mr. Smith for more franks, and still more obliged by the handsome note with which he accompanied them. He has furnished me sufficiently for the present occasion, and by his readiness, and obliging manner of doing it, encouraged me to have recourse to him, in case another exigence of the same kind should offer. A French author I was reading last night says, He that has written, will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation; and when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake the production of another volume. At present, however, I do not feel myself so disposed; and, indeed, he that would write, should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that, being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own. I reckon it among my principal advantages, as a composer of verses, that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years. Imitation, even of the best models, is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical, a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it; and we imitate in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire. But enough of this.

Your mother, who is as well as the season of the year will permit, desires me to add her love. The salmon you sent us arrived safe, and was remarkably fresh. What a comfort it is to have a friend who knows that we love salmon, and who cannot pass by a fishmonger's shop, without finding his desire to send us some, a temptation too strong to be resisted!— Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 26, 1781.

My dear Friend—I wrote to you by the last post, supposing you at Stock; but lest that letter should not follow you to Leytonstone, and you should suspect me of unreasonable delay, and lest the frank you have sent me should degenerate into waste paper, and perish upon my hands, I write again. The former letter, however, containing all my present stock of intelligence, it is more than possible that this may prove a blank, or but little worthy of your acceptance. You will do me the justice to suppose, that if I could be very entertaining, I would be so, because, by giving me credit for such a willingness to please, you only allow me a share of that universal vanity, which inclines every man, upon all occasions, to exhibit himself to the best advantage. To say the truth, however, when I write, as I do to you, not about business, nor on any subject that approaches to that description, I mean much less my correspondent's amusement, which my modesty will not always permit me to hope for, than my own. There is a pleasure annexed to the communication of one's ideas, whether by word of mouth, or by letter, which nothing earthly can supply the place of, and it is the delight we find in this mutual intercourse, that not only proves us to be creatures intended for social life, but more than anything else perhaps fits us for it.—I have no patience with philosophers;—they, one and all, suppose (at least I understand it to be a prevailing opinion among them) that man's weakness, his necessities, his inability to stand alone, have furnished the prevailing motive, under the influence of which he renounced at first a life of solitude, and became a gregarious creature. It seems to me more reasonable, as well as more honourable to my species, to suppose that generosity of soul, and a brotherly attachment to our own kind, drew us, as it were, to one common centre, taught us to build cities, and inhabit them, and welcome every stranger, that would cast in his lot amongst us, that we might

enjoy fellowship with each other, and the luxury of reciprocal endearments, without which a paradise could afford no comfort. There are indeed all sorts of characters in the world; there are some whose understandings are so sluggish, and whose hearts are such mere clods, that they live in society without either contributing to the sweets of it, or having any relish for them. A man of this stamp passes by our window continually; he draws patterns for the lace-maker's; I never saw him conversing with a neighbour but once in my life, though I have known him by sight these twelve years; he is of a very sturdy make, has a round belly, extremely protuberant, which he evidently considers as his best friend, because it is his only companion, and it is the labour of his life to fill it. I can easily conceive that it is merely the love of good eating and drinking, and now and then the want of a new pair of shoes, that attaches this man so much to the neighbourhood of his fellow-mortals; for suppose these exigencies, and others of a like kind, to subsist no longer, and what is there that could possibly give society the preference in his esteem? He might strut about with his two thumbs upon his hips in a wilderness; he could hardly be more silent than he is at Olney, and for any advantage, or comfort, or friendship, or brotherly affection, he could not be more destitute of such blessings there than in his present situation. But other men have something more than guts to satisfy; there are the yearnings of the heart, which, let philosophers say what they will, are more importunate than all the necessities of the body, that will not suffer a creature, worthy to be called human, to be content with an insulated life, or to look for his friends among the beasts of the forest. Yourself for instance! It is not because there are no tailors or pastry-cooks to be found upon Salisbury Plain, that you do not choose it for your abode, but because you are a philanthropist,—because you are susceptible of social impressions, and have a pleasure in doing a kindness when you can.—Witness the salmon you sent, and the salmon you still mean to send; to

which your mother wishes you to add a handful of prawns, not only because she likes them, but because they agree with her so well that she even finds them medicinal.

Now upon the word of a poor creature, I have said all that I have said, without the least intention to say one word of it when I began. But thus it is with my thoughts :—when you shake a crab-tree, the fruit falls ; good for nothing indeed when you have got it, but still the best that is to be expected from a crab-tree. You are welcome to them, such as they are, and if you approve my sentiments, tell the philosophers of the day, that I have outshot them all, and have discovered the true origin of society, when I least looked for it.

We should be glad to receive this fresh proof of your regard, viz. the additional piece of salmon, at any time before Christmas. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

My dear William— . . . I am glad (we are both so) that you are not afraid of seeing your own image multiplied too fast : it is not necessarily a disadvantage. It is sometimes easier to manage and provide for half a dozen children, than to regulate the passions and satisfy the extravagant demands of one. I remember hearing Moses Browne say, that when he had only two or three children, he thought he should have been distracted ; but when he had ten or a dozen, he was perfectly easy, and thought no more about the matter. W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Nov. 27, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . This afternoon the maid opened the parlour-door, and told us there was a lady in the kitchen. We desired she might be introduced, and prepared for the reception of Mrs. Jones. But it proved to be a lady unknown to us, and not Mrs. Jones. She walked directly up to Mrs. Unwin, and never drew back till their noses were almost in contact. It

seemed as if she meant to salute her. An uncommon degree of familiarity, accompanied with an air of most extraordinary gravity, made me think her a little crazy. I was alarmed, and so was Mrs. Unwin. She had a bundle in her hand—a silk handkerchief tied up at the four corners. When I found she was not mad, I took her for a smuggler, and made no doubt but she had brought samples of contraband goods. But our surprise, considering the lady's appearance and deportment, was tenfold what it had been, when we found that it was Mary Philips's daughter, who had brought us a few apples by way of a specimen of a quantity she had for sale. She drank tea with us, and behaved herself during the rest of her stay with much—*caetera desunt.*

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Nov. 30, 1781.

My dear Friend—Though I have a deal of wit, and Mrs. Unwin has much more, it would require more than our joint stock amounts to, to answer all the demands of these gloomy days and long evenings. Books are the only remedy I can think of, but books are a commodity we deal but little in at Olney. If therefore it may consist with your other various multifarious concerns, I shall be obliged to you if you will be so good as to subscribe for me to some well-furnished circulating library, and leave my address upon the counter, written in a legible hand, and order them to send me down a catalogue. Their address you will be so good as to transmit to me, and then you shall have no further trouble.

This being merely a letter of business I add no more, but that I am yours, Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Dec. 9, 1781.

My dear Friend—Having returned you many thanks for the fine cod and oysters you favoured me with,

though it is now morning I will suppose it afternoon, that you and I dined together, are comfortably situated by a good fire, and just entering on a sociable conversation. You speak first, because I am a man of few words.

Well, Cowper, what do you think of this American war?

I. To say the truth I am not very fond of thinking about it; when I do, I think of it unpleasantly enough. I think it bids fair to be the ruin of the country.

You. That's very unpleasant indeed! If that should be the consequence, it will be the fault of those who might put a stop to it if they would.

I. But do you really think that practicable?

You. Why not? If people leave off fighting, peace follows of course. I wish they would withdraw the forces and put an end to the squabble.

Now I am going to make a long speech.

I. You know the complexion of my sentiments upon some subjects well enough, and that I do not look upon public events either as fortuitous, or absolutely derivable either from the wisdom or folly of man. These indeed operate as second causes; but we must look for the cause of the decline or the prosperity of an empire elsewhere. I have long since done complaining of men and measures, having learned to consider them merely as the instruments of a higher Power, by which he either bestows wealth, peace, and dignity upon a nation when he favours it; or by which he strips it of all those honours, when public enormities long persisted in provoke him to inflict a public punishment. The counsels of great men become as foolish and preposterous when he is pleased to make them so, as those of the frantic creatures in Bedlam, when they lay their distracted heads together to consider of the state of the nation. But I go still further. The wisdom, or the want of wisdom, that we observe or think we observe in those that rule us, entirely out of the question, I cannot look upon the circumstances of this country, without being persuaded that I discern in them an entanglement and

perplexity that I have never met with in the history of any other, which I think preternatural (if I may use the word on such a subject), prodigious in its kind, and such as human sagacity can never remedy. I have a good opinion of the understanding and integrity of some in power, yet I see plainly that they are unequal to the task. I think as favourably of some that are not in power, yet I am sure they have never yet in any of their speeches recommended the plan that would effect the salutary purpose. If we pursue the war, it is because we are desperate; it is plunging and sinking year after year into still greater depths of calamity. If we relinquish it, the remedy is equally desperate, and would prove I believe in the end no remedy at all. Either way we are undone. Perseverance will only enfeeble us more; we cannot recover the colonies by arms. If we discontinue the attempt, in that case we fling away voluntarily what in the other we strive ineffectually to regain; and whether we adopt the one measure or the other, are equally undone: for I consider the loss of America as the ruin of England. Were we less encumbered than we are at home, we could but ill afford it; but being crushed as we are under an enormous debt that the public credit can at no rate carry much longer, the consequence is sure. Thus it appears to me that we are squeezed to death, between the two sides of that sort of alternative which is commonly called a cleft stick, the most threatening and portentous condition in which the interests of any country can possibly be found.

I think I have done pretty well for a man of few words, and have contrived to have all the talk to myself. I thank you for not interrupting me.—Yours, my dear Friend, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 17, 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . It is a happiness in poor Peggy's case that she can swallow five shillings' worth

of physic in a day, but a person must be in her case to be duly sensible of it.—Yours, my dear Sir, W. C.

Mrs. Unwin begs Mrs. Newton's acceptance of a couple of chickens. She would have sent a goose, but none have come our way.

James Robinson was buried on Sunday. The opinion of the well-informed is that his drams cost him a guinea a week to the last.

To the Rev. John Newton

The last day of 1781.

My dear Friend— . . . I consider England and America as once one country. They were so, in respect of interest, intercourse, and affinity. A great earthquake has made a partition, and now the Atlantic Ocean flows between them. He that can drain that ocean, and shove the two shores together, so as to make them aptly coincide, and meet each other in every part, can unite them again. But this is a work for Omnipotence, and nothing less than Omnipotence can heal the breach between us. This dispensation is evidently a scourge to England;—but is it a blessing to America? Time may prove it one, but at present it does not seem to wear an aspect favourable to their privileges, either civil or religious. I cannot doubt the truth of Dr. W.'s assertion; but the French who pay but little regard to treaties that clash with their convenience, without a treaty, and even in direct contradiction to verbal engagements, can easily pretend a claim to a country which they have both bled and paid for; and if the validity of that claim be disputed, behold an army ready landed, and well-appointed, and in possession of some of the most fruitful provinces, prepared to prove it. A scourge is a scourge at one end only. A bundle of thunderbolts, such as you have seen in the talons of Jupiter's eagle, is at both ends equally tremendous, and can inflict a judgement upon the West, at the same moment that it seems to intend only the chastisement of the East. . . .

I should have sent you a longer letter, but a visitor who is more tedious than entertaining has rather disconcerted me, and exhausted my spirits. 'Your humble servant, Sir—I hope I see you well.—I thank you, Madam, but indifferent. I have had a violent colic, which providentially took a turn downwards, or I think I must have died. Seven or eight times in a night, Madam. My neighbour Banister has the same disorder, and is remarkably costive, so that I verily fear for his life. Yes truly, I think the poor man cannot get over it.' This is a small specimen—how should you like the whole? I can find you a sheet full of the like whenever you please, taken faithfully from his lips. . . .—Yours, my dear Sir, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Jan. 5, 1782.

My dear Friend—Did I allow myself to plead the common excuse of idle correspondents, and esteem it a sufficient reason for not writing, that I have nothing to write about, I certainly should not write now. But I have so often found, on similar occasions, when a great penury of matter has seemed to threaten me with an utter impossibility of hatching a letter, that nothing is necessary but to put pen to paper, and go on, in order to conquer all difficulties,—that, availing myself of past experience, I now begin with a most assured persuasion, that sooner or later, one idea naturally suggesting another, I shall come to a most prosperous conclusion.

In the last Review, I mean in the last but one, I saw Johnson's critique upon Prior and Pope. I am bound to acquiesce in his opinion of the latter, because it has always been my own. I could never agree with those who preferred him to Dryden; nor with others (I have known such, and persons of taste and discernment too), who could not allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses, and in every line he ever wrote, we see indubitable marks of the most indefatigable industry and labour. Writers who

find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, but so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope with all his touching and retouching could never equal. So far, therefore, I have no quarrel with Johnson. But I cannot subscribe to what he says of Prior. In the first place, though my memory may fail me, I do not recollect that he takes any notice of his Solomon; in my mind the best poem, whether we consider the subject of it, or the execution, that he ever wrote. In the next place, he condemns him for introducing Venus and Cupid into his love-verses, and concludes it impossible his passion could be sincere, because when he would express it he has recourse to fables. But when Prior wrote, those deities were not so obsolete as now. His contemporary writers, and some that succeeded him, did not think them beneath their notice. Tibullus, in reality, disbelieved their existence as much as we do; yet Tibullus is allowed to be the prince of all poetical inamoratos, though he mentions them in almost every page. There is a fashion in these things which the Doctor seems to have forgotten. But what shall we say of his old fusty-rusty remarks upon Henry and Emma? I agree with him, that morally considered both the knight and his lady are bad characters, and that each exhibits an example which ought not to be followed. The man dissembles in a way that would have justified the woman had she renounced him; and the woman resolves to follow him at the expense of delicacy, pro-

priety, and even modesty itself. But when the critic calls it a dull dialogue, who but a critic will believe him? There are few readers of poetry of either sex, in this country, who cannot remember how that enchanting piece has bewitched them, who do not know, that instead of finding it tedious, they have been so delighted with the romantic turn of it, as to have overlooked all its defects, and to have given it a consecrated place in their memories, without ever feeling it a burthen. I wonder almost that, as the Bacchanals served Orpheus, the boys and girls do not tear this husky, dry commentator limb from limb, in resentment of such an injury done to their darling poet. I admire Johnson as a man of great erudition and sense; but when he sets himself up for a judge of writers upon the subject of love, a passion which I suppose he never felt in his life, he might as well think himself qualified to pronounce upon a treatise on horsemanship, or the art of fortification.

The next packet I receive will bring me, I imagine, the last proof sheet of my volume, which will consist of about three hundred and fifty pages honestly printed. My public *entrée* therefore is not far distant.

Had we known that the last cheeses were naught, we would not have sent you these. Your mother has however inquired for and found a better dairy, which she means shall furnish you with cheese another year.
—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Jan. 13, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . More is to be learned from one matter of fact than from a thousand speculations. But, alas! what course can government take? I have heard (for I never made the experiment) that if a man grasp a red-hot iron with his naked hand, it will stick to him, so that he cannot presently disengage himself from it. Such are the colonies in the hands of adminis-

tration. While they hold them they burn their fingers, and yet they must not quit them. . . .—Yours, my dear Sir, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Jan. 17, 1782.

My dear William—I am glad we agree in our opinion of King Critic, and the writers on whom he has bestowed his animadversions. It is a matter of indifference to me whether I think with the world at large or not, but I wish my friends to be of my mind. The same work will wear a different appearance in the eyes of the same man, according to the different views with which he reads it; if merely for his amusement, his candour being in less danger of a twist from interest or prejudice, he is pleased with what is really pleasing, and is not over curious to discover a blemish, because the exercise of a minute exactness is not consistent with his purpose. But if he once becomes a critic by trade, the case is altered. He must then at any rate establish, if he can, an opinion in every mind, of his uncommon discernment, and his exquisite taste. This great end he can never accomplish by thinking in the track that has been beaten under the hoof of public judgement. He must endeavour to convince the world, that their favourite authors have more faults than they are aware of, and such as they have never suspected. Having marked out a writer universally esteemed, whom he finds it for that very reason convenient to depreciate and traduce, he will overlook some of his beauties, he will faintly praise others, and in such a manner as to make thousands, more modest, though quite as judicious as himself, question whether they are beauties at all. Can there be a stronger illustration of all that I have said, than the severity of Johnson's remarks upon Prior, I might have said the injustice? His reputation as an author who, with much labour indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease, stood unshaken

till Johnson thrust his head against it. And how does he attack him in this his principal fort? I cannot recollect his very words, but I am much mistaken indeed if my memory fails me with respect to the purport of them. 'His words,' he says, 'appear to be forced into their proper places; there indeed we find them, but find likewise that their arrangement has been the effect of constraint, and that without violence they would certainly have stood in a different order.' By your leave, most learned Doctor, this is the most disingenuous remark I ever met with, and would have come with a better grace from Curll or Dennis. Every man conversant with verse-writing knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose, without being prosaic,—to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was Prior; many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original. And now to tell us, after we and our fathers have admired him for it so long, that he is an easy writer indeed, but that his ease has an air of stiffness in it, in short, that his ease is not ease, but only something like it, what is it but a self-contradiction, an observation that grants what it is just going to deny, and denies what it has just granted, in the same sentence, and in the same breath? But I have filled the greatest part of my sheet with a very uninteresting subject. I will only say, that as a nation we are not much indebted, in point of poetical credit, to this too sagacious and unmerciful judge; and that for myself in particular, I have reason to rejoice that he entered upon and exhausted the labours of his office before my poor volume could possibly become an object of them. By the way, you cannot have a book at the time you

mention; I have lived a fortnight or more in expectation of the last sheet, which is not yet arrived.

You have already furnished John's memory with by far the greatest part of what a parent would wish to store it with. If all that is merely trivial, and all that has an immoral tendency, were expunged from our English poets, how would they shrink, and how would some of them completely vanish! I believe there are some of Dryden's *Fables* which he would find very entertaining; they are for the most part fine compositions, and not above his apprehension; but Dryden has written few things that are not blotted here and there with an unchaste allusion, so that you must pick his way for him, lest he should tread in the dirt. You did not mention Milton's *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, which I remember being so charmed with when I was a boy that I was never weary of them. There are even passages in the paradisiacal part of the *Paradise Lost*, which he might study with advantage. And to teach him, as you can, to deliver some of the fine orations made in the Pandaemonium, and those between Satan, Ithuriel, and Zephon, with emphasis, dignity, and propriety, might be of great use to him hereafter. The sooner the ear is formed, and the organs of speech are accustomed to the various inflections of the voice, which the rehearsal of those passages demands, the better. I should think too, that Thomson's *Seasons* might afford him some useful lessons. At least they would have a tendency to give his mind an observing and a philosophical turn. I do not forget that he is but a child. But I remember that he is a child favoured with talents superior to his years. We were much pleased with his remarks on your almsgiving, and doubt not but it will be verified with respect to the two guineas you sent us, which have made four Christian people happy. Ships I have none, nor have touched a pencil these three years; if ever I take it up again, which I rather suspect I shall not (the employment requiring stronger eyes than mine), it shall be at John's service.—Yours, my dear Friend,

W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Jan. 31, 1782.

My dear Friend—Having thanked you for a barrel of very fine oysters, I should have nothing more to say, if I did not determine to say everything that may happen to occur. The political world affords us no very agreeable subjects at present, nor am I sufficiently conversant with it, to do justice to so magnificent a theme, if it did. A man that lives as I do, whose chief occupation, at this season of the year, is to walk ten times in a day from the fireside to his cucumber frame and back again, cannot show his wisdom more, if he has any wisdom to show, than by leaving the mysteries of government to the management of persons, in point of situation and information, much better qualified for the business. Suppose not, however, that I am perfectly an unconcerned spectator, or that I take no interest at all in the affairs of my country; far from it —I read the news—I see that things go wrong in every quarter. I meet, now and then, with an account of some disaster that seems to be the indisputable progeny of treachery, cowardice, or a spirit of faction; I recollect that in those happier days, when you and I could spend our evening in enumerating victories and acquisitions that seemed to follow each other in a continued series, there was some pleasure in hearing a politician; and a man might talk away upon so entertaining a subject, without danger of becoming tiresome to others, or incurring weariness himself. When poor Bob White brought me the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal, how did I leap for joy! When Hawke demolished Conflans, I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture, when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec. I am not, therefore, I suppose, destitute of true patriotism, but the course of public events has, of late, afforded me no opportunity to exert it. I cannot rejoice, because I see no reason, and I will not murmur, because for that I

can find no good one. And let me add, he that has seen both sides of fifty, has lived to little purpose, if he has not other views of the world than he had when he was much younger. He finds, if he reflects at all, that it will be to the end, what it has been from the beginning, a shifting, uncertain, fluctuating scene; that nations, as well as individuals, have their seasons of infancy, youth, and age. If he be an Englishman, he will observe that ours, in particular, is affected with every symptom of decay, and is already sunk into a state of decrepitude. I am reading Mrs. Macaulay's History. I am not quite such a superannuated simpleton, as to suppose that mankind were wiser or much better, when I was young, than they are now. But I may venture to assert, without exposing myself to the charge of dotage, that the men whose integrity, courage, and wisdom, broke the bands of tyranny, established our constitution upon its true basis, and gave a people, overwhelmed with the scorn of all countries, an opportunity to emerge into a state of the highest respect and estimation, make a better figure in history than any of the present day are likely to do, when their petty harangues are forgotten, and nothing shall survive but the remembrance of the views and motives with which they made them.

My dear friend, I have written at random, in every sense, neither knowing what sentiments I should broach, when I began, nor whether they would accord with yours. Excuse a rustic, if he errs on such a subject, and believe me sincerely yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. John Newton

Feb. 2, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . George Mayne, whom I suppose you remember, a farmer that lived on the beautiful side of a hill in Weston parish, died last week. If you recollect the man, you recollect too that he made it his principal glory to believe that he

and his two mastiffs would come to one and the same conclusion, and that no part of either would survive the grave. Mr. Page attended him, preached his funeral sermon, and informed the largest congregation ever seen at Weston that he converted him. I cannot learn however that any competent judge of the matter has given the tale a moment's credit, or that any better proof of this wonder has been produced, than that poor George desired to be buried in his pew, to make some amends I suppose for having never visited it while he lived. . . .—Yours, my dear Sir, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Feb. 9, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . It is not in general till reading and observation have settled the taste, that we can give the prize to the best writing, in preference to the worst. Much less are we able to execute what is good ourselves. But Lowth seems to have stepped into excellence at once, and to have gained by intuition, what we little folks are happy, if we can learn at last, after much labour of our own, and instruction of others. The compliments he pays to the memory of King Charles, he would probably now retract, though he be a Bishop, and his Majesty's zeal for episcopacy was one of the causes of his ruin. An age or two must pass, before some characters can be properly understood. The spirit of party employs itself in veiling their faults, and ascribing to them virtues which they never possessed. See Charles's face drawn by Clarendon, and it is a handsome portrait. See it more justly exhibited by Mrs. Macaulay, and it is deformed to a degree that shocks us. Every feature expresses cunning, employing itself in the attainment of tyranny and dissimulation, pretending itself an advocate for truth.

I have a piece of secret history to communicate which I would have imparted sooner, but that I thought it possible there might be no occasion to mention it at all.

When persons for whom I have felt a friendship, disappoint and mortify me by their conduct, or act unjustly towards me, though I no longer esteem them friends, I still feel that tenderness for their character that I would conceal the blemish if I could. But in making known the following anecdote to you, I run no risk of a publication, assured that when I have once enjoined you secrecy, you will observe it.

My letters have already apprised you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Ann Street, and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house, and educated together. At her departure, she herself proposed a correspondence, and because writing does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained, before I discovered, by some slight intimations of it, that she had conceived displeasure at somewhat I had written, though I cannot now recollect it: conscious of none but the most upright inoffensive intentions, I yet apologized for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence after this proceeded smoothly for a considerable time, but at length having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end, but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter, she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But

it gave mortal offence; it received indeed an answer, but such an one as I could by no means reply to; and there ended (for it was impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting; being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world, and great experience of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion, and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety, she is a great thinker), induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add, that by her own desire I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as my sister.—*Ceu fumus in auras.* . . . —Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Feb. 24, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . Having imparted to you an account of the fracas between us and Lady Austen, it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with every event that bears any relation to that incident. The day before yesterday she sent me, by her brother-in-law, Mr. Jones, three pair of worked ruffles, with advice that I should soon receive a fourth. I knew they were begun before we quarrelled. I begged Mr. Jones to tell her when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged, and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate, though the only return in my power, by laying my volume at her feet. This likewise she had previous reason given to expect. Thus stands the affair at present; whether anything in the shape of a reconciliation is to take place hereafter, I know not; but this I know, that when an amicable freedom of intercourse, and that unreserved confidence which belongs only to true friendship, has been once unrooted, plant it again with what care you may, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make it grow. The fear of giving offence to a temper

too apt to take it, is unfavourable to that comfort we propose to ourselves even in our ordinary connexions, but absolutely incompatible with the pleasures of real friendship. She is to spend the summer in our neighbourhood, Lady Peterborough and Miss Mordaunt are to be of the party; the former a dissipated woman of fashion, and the latter a haughty beauty. Retirement is our passion and our delight; it is in still life alone we look for that measure of happiness we can rationally expect below. What have we to do therefore with characters like these? shall we go to the dancing school again? shall we cast off the simplicity of our plain and artless demeanour, to learn, and not in a youthful day neither, the manners of those whose manners at the best are their only recommendation, and yet can in reality recommend them to none, but to people like themselves? This would be folly which nothing but necessity could excuse, and in our case no such necessity can possibly obtain. We will not go into the world, and if the world would come to us, we must give it the French answer—*Monsieur et Madame ne sont pas visibles*. . . .—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

March 7, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . We are far from wishing a renewal of the connexion we have lately talked about. We did indeed find it in a certain way an agreeable one while that lady continued in the country, yet not altogether compatible with our favourite plan, with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts, and an uncommon fluency of expression, but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us; occasionally perhaps it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match for her. But after all, it does not entirely depend upon us, whether

our former intimacy shall take place again or not; or rather whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little by her sending the ruffles, and by the terms in which she spoke of us to you, that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude; but I can answer for us both, that we shall enter into the connexion again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced. If you thought she fell short of the description I gave of her, I still think however that it was not a partial one, and that it did not make too favourable a representation of her character. You *must* have seen her to a disadvantage; a consciousness of a quarrel so recent, and in which she had expressed herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked us both, must unavoidably have produced its effect upon her behaviour, which though it could not be awkward, must have been in some degree unnatural, her attention being necessarily pretty much engrossed by a recollection of what had passed between us. I would by no means have hazarded you into her company, if I had not been sure that she would treat you with politeness, and almost persuaded that she would soon see the unreasonableness of her conduct, and make a suitable apology. . . .

What a medley are our public prints, half the page filled with the ruin of the country, and the other half filled with the vices and pleasures of it;—here an island taken, and there a new comedy;—here an empire lost, and there an Italian opera, or the Duke of Gloucester's rout on a Sunday!

'May it please your R.H.! I am an Englishman, and must stand or fall with the nation. Religion, its true Palladium, has been stolen away; and it is crumbling into dust. Sin ruins us, the sins of the great especially, and of their sins especially the violation of the Sabbath, because it is naturally productive of all the rest. Is it fit that a Prince should make the

Sabbath a day of dissipation, and that not content with his own personal profanation of it, he should invite all whose rank entitles them to the honour of such distinction, to partake with him in his guilt? Are examples operative in proportion to the dignity of those who set them? Whose then more pernicious than your own in this flagrant instance of impiety? For shame, Sir!—if you wish well to your brother's arms, and would be glad to see the kingdom emerging again from her ruins, pay more respect to an ordinance that deserves the deepest! I do not say pardon this short remonstrance;——The concern I feel for my country, and the interest I have in its prosperity, give me a right to make it. I am, &c.'

Thus one might write to his Highness, and (I suppose) might be as profitably employed in whistling the tune of an old ballad. Lord P—— had a rout too on the same day.—Is he the son of that P—— who bought Punch for a hundred pounds, and having kept him a week, tore him limb from limb because he was sullen and would not speak?—Probably he is. . . .—Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. William Bull

March 24, 1782.

My dear Sir—If you had only commended me as a poet, I should have swallowed your praises whole, have smacked my lips, and made no reply; but as you offer me your friendship, and account me worthy of your affection, which I esteem a much greater honour than that of being a poet, though even approved by you, it seems necessary that I should not be quite dumb upon so interesting an occasion.

Your letter gave me great pleasure, both as a testimony of your approbation, and of your regard. I wrote in hopes of pleasing you, and such as you; and though I must confess that, at the same time, I cast a side-long glance at the good liking of the world at large, I believe I can say it was more for the sake of

their advantage and instruction than their praise. They are children: if we give them physic, we must sweeten the rim of the cup with honey. If my book is so far honoured as to be made a vehicle of true knowledge to any that are ignorant, I shall rejoice; and do already rejoice that it has procured me a proof of your esteem, whom I had rather please than all the writers of both Reviews.

When your leisure and your health will allow you to trot over to Olney, you will most assuredly be welcome to us both, and even welcome if you please to light your pipe with the page in question.—Yours, my dear Friend, affectionately, WM. COWPER.

To the Rev. William Unwin

April 1, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . We laughed heartily at your reply to little John's question; and yet I think you might have given him a direct answer—'There are various sorts of cleverness, my dear; I do not know that mine lies in the poetical way, but I can do ten times more towards the entertainment of company in the way of conversation than our friend at Olney. He can rhyme, and I can rattle. If he had my talent, and I had his, we should be too charming, and the world would almost adore us.' . . .—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

If your short stay in town will afford you an opportunity, I should be glad if you would buy me a genteelish toothpick case. I shall not think half a guinea too much for it; only it must be one that will not easily break. If second-hand, perhaps, it may be the better.

To the Rev. William Unwin, at the Rev. Matthew Powley's, Dewsbury, near Wakefield

April 27, 1782.

My dear William—A part of Lord Harrington's new-raised corps have taken up their quarters at Olney

since you left us. They have the regimental music with them. The men have been drawn up this morning upon the Market-hill, and a concert, such as we have not heard these many years, has been performed at no great distance from our window. Your mother and I both thrust our heads into the coldest east wind that ever blew in April, that we might hear them to greater advantage. The band acquitted themselves with taste and propriety, not *blaring*, like trumpeters at a fair, but producing gentle and elegant symphony, such as charmed our ears, and convinced us that no length of time can wear out a taste for harmony; and that though plays, balls, and masquerades have lost all their power to please us, and we should find them not only insipid but insupportable, yet sweet music is sure to find a corresponding faculty in the soul, a sensibility that lives to the last, which even religion itself does not extinguish. I must pity therefore some good people (at least some who once were thought such), who have been fiddled out of all their Christian profession; and having forsaken the world for a time, have danced into it again with all their might. It is a snare from which I myself should find it difficult to escape, were I much in the way of it. . . .

The curate's simile Latinized :—

> Sors adversa gerit stimulum, sed tendit et alas;
> Pungit, api similis, sed, velut ista, fugit.

What a dignity there is in the Roman language! and what an idea it gives us of the good sense and masculine mind of the people that spoke it! The same thought, which clothed in English seems childish, and even foolish, assumes a different air in Latin, and makes at least as good an epigram as some of Martial's.

I remember your making an observation, while here, on the subject of parentheses, to which I acceded without limitation; but a little attention will convince us both, that they are not to be universally condemned. When they abound, and when they are long, they both embarrass the sense, and are a proof that the writer's head is cloudy, that he has not properly arranged his

matter, or is not well skilled in the graces of expression. But as parenthesis is ranked by grammarians among the figures of rhetoric, we may suppose they had a reason for conferring that honour upon it. Accordingly we shall find that in the use of some of our finest writers, as well as in the hands of the ancient poets and orators, it has a peculiar elegance, and imparts a beauty which the period would want without it.

> 'Hoc nemus, hunc,' inquit, 'frondoso vertice collem
> (Quis deus incertum est) habitat deus.'—VIR. *Aen.* 8.

In this instance, the first that occurred, it is graceful. I have not time to seek for more, nor room to insert them. But your own observation I believe will confirm my opinion. . . .—Yours ever, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

May 27, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . A merchant, a friend of ours (you will soon guess him), sent my Poems to one of the first philosophers, one of the most eminent literary characters, as well as one of the most important in the political world, that the present age can boast of. Now perhaps your conjecturing faculties are puzzled, and you begin to ask, 'Who, where, and what is he? speak out, for I am all impatience.' I will not say a word more, the letter in which he returned his thanks for the present shall speak for him.

Passy, May 8, 1782.

Sir—I received the letter you did me the honour of writing to me, and am much obliged by your kind present of a book. The relish for reading of poetry had long since left me, but there is something so new in the manner, so easy, and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiments, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once. I beg you to accept my thankful acknowledgements, and to present my respects to the author.

I shall take care to forward the letters to America, and shall be glad of any other opportunity of doing what may be agreeable to you, being with great respect for your character, your most obedient humble servant,

B. FRANKLIN.

We may now treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas, when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, 'Begone for a jackanapes, and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it.'

We are glad that you are safe at home again. Could we see at one glance of the eye what is passing every day upon all the roads in the kingdom, how many are terrified and hurt, how many plundered and abused, we should indeed find reason enough to be thankful for journeys performed in safety, and for deliverance from dangers we are not perhaps even permitted to see. When in some of the high southern latitudes, and in a dark tempestuous night, a flash of lightning discovered to Captain Cook a vessel, which glanced along close by his side, and which, but for the lightning, he must have run foul of, both the danger, and the transient light that showed it, were undoubtedly designed to convey to him this wholesome instruction, that a particular Providence attended him, and that he was not only preserved from evils, of which he had notice, but from many more of which he had no information, or even the least suspicion. What unlikely contingencies may nevertheless take place! How improbable that two ships should dash against each other, in the midst of the vast Pacific Ocean, and that steering contrary courses, from parts of the world so immensely distant from each other, they should yet move so exactly in a line as to clash, fill, and go to the bottom, in a sea where all the ships in the world might be so dispersed as that none should see another! Yet this must have happened but for the remarkable interference which he has recorded. The same Providence indeed might as easily have conducted them so wide of each other,

that they should never have met at all; but then this lesson would have been lost; at least, the heroic voyager would have encompassed the globe without having had occasion to relate an incident that so naturally suggests it. . . .—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

June 12, 1782.

My dear Friend—Every extraordinary occurrence in our lives affords us an opportunity to learn, if we will, something more of our own hearts and tempers than we were before aware of. It is easy to promise ourselves beforehand, that our conduct shall be wise, or moderate, or resolute, on any given occasion. But when that occasion occurs, we do not always find it easy to make good the promise: such a difference there is between theory and practice. Perhaps this is no new remark; but it is not a whit the worse for being old, if it be true.

Before I had published, I said to myself—You and I, Mr. Cowper, will not concern ourselves much about what the critics may say of our book. But having once sent my wits for a venture, I soon became anxious about the issue, and found that I could not be satisfied with a warm place in my own good graces, unless my friends were pleased with me as much as I pleased myself. Meeting with their approbation, I began to feel the workings of ambition. It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased, but friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias: methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me. I was presently gratified by the approbation of the *London Magazine,* and the *Gentleman's,* particularly by that of the former, and by the plaudit of Dr. Franklin. By the way, magazines are publications we have but little respect for, till we ourselves are chronicled in them, and then they assume an importance in our esteem which before we could not allow them. But the *Monthly Review,* the

most formidable of all my judges, is still behind. What will that critical Radamanthus say, when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I must wait another month for his award. Alas! when I wish for a favourable sentence from that quarter (to confess a weakness that I should not confess to all), I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbours at Olney. Here are watchmakers, who themselves are wits, and who at present perhaps think me one. Here is a carpenter, and a baker, and not to mention others, here is your idol Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the *Monthly Review*, and all these will set me down for a dunce, if those terrible critics show them the example. But oh! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffith, let me pass for a genius at Olney!... —Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

My dear Friend— . . . I enclose a letter from Lady Austen, which I beg you to return to me in your next. Her sister was the bearer of it. We are reconciled. She seized the first opportunity to embrace your mother with tears of the tenderest affection, and I of course am satisfied. We were all a little awkward at first, but now are as easy as ever. She stays at Clifton till after Christmas. Having been obliged to communicate our disagreement, I give myself a release from that obligation of secrecy, under which I am engaged with respect to her other letters, accounting this, indeed, no part of our correspondence. . . .—Yours, Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

July 16, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . I remember reading many years ago a long treatise on the subject of consolation, written in French; the author's name I forget, but I

wrote these words in the margin: 'Special consolation! at least for a Frenchman, who is a creature the most easily comforted of any in the world!'

We are as happy in Lady Austen, and she in us, as ever;—having a lively imagination, and being passionately desirous of consolidating all into one family (for she has taken her leave of London), she has just sprung a project which serves at least to amuse us, and to make us laugh; it is, to hire Mr. Small's house, on the top of Clifton-hill, which is large, commodious, and handsome, will hold us conveniently, and any friends who may occasionally favour us with a visit. The house is furnished; but, if it can be hired without the furniture, will let for a trifle. Your sentiments, if you please, upon this *demarche*!

I give you joy of a happy change in the season, and myself also. I have filled four sides in less time than two would have cost me a week ago; such is the effect of sunshine upon such a butterfly as I am.—Yours,

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Aug. 3, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . It is a sort of paradox, but it is true: we are never more in danger than when we think ourselves most secure, nor in reality more secure than when we seem to be most in danger. Both sides of this apparent contradiction were lately verified in my experience.—Passing from the greenhouse to the barn, I saw three kittens (for we have so many in our retinue) looking with fixed attention at something, which lay on the threshold of a door, coiled up. I took but little notice of them at first; but a loud hiss engaged me to attend more closely, when behold—a viper! the largest I remember to have seen, rearing itself, darting its forked tongue, and ejaculating the aforementioned hiss at the nose of a kitten almost in contact with his lips. I ran into the hall for a hoe with a long handle, with which I intended to assail him, and returning in a few seconds missed him: he was gone, and I

feared had escaped me. Still however the kitten sat watching immoveably upon the same spot. I concluded, therefore, that, sliding between the door and the threshold, he had found his way out of the garden into the yard. I went round immediately, and there found him in close conversation with the old cat, whose curiosity being excited by so novel an appearance, inclined her to pat his head repeatedly with her fore foot; with her claws however sheathed, and not in anger; but in the way of philosophical inquiry and examination. To prevent her falling a victim to so laudable an exercise of her talents, I interposed in a moment with the hoe, and performed upon him an act of decapitation, which though not immediately mortal, proved so in the end. Had he slid into the passages, where it is dark, or had he, when in the yard, met with no interruption from the cat, and secreted himself in any of the outhouses, it is hardly possible but that some of the family must have been bitten; he might have been trodden upon without being perceived, and have slipped away before the sufferer could have well distinguished what foe had wounded him. Three years ago we discovered one in the same place, which the barber slew with a trowel.

Our proposed removal to Mr. Small's was, as you suppose, a jest, or rather a joco-serious matter. We never looked upon it as entirely feasible, yet we saw in it something so like practicability, that we did not esteem it altogether unworthy of our attention. It was one of those projects which people of lively imaginations play with, and admire for a few days, and then break in pieces. Lady Austen returned on Thursday from London, where she spent the last fortnight, and whither she was called by an unexpected opportunity to dispose of the remainder of her lease. She has now therefore no longer any connexion with the great city, she has none on earth whom she calls friends but us, and no house but at Olney. Her abode is to be at the vicarage, where she has hired as much room as she wants, which she will embellish with her own furniture, and which she will occupy as soon as the minister's wife

has produced another child, which is expected to make its entry in October.

Mr. Bull, a dissenting minister of Newport, a learned, ingenious, good-natured, pious friend of ours, who sometimes visits us, and whom we visited last week, has put into my hands three volumes of French poetry, composed by Madam Guyon;—a quietist say you, and a fanatic, I will have nothing to do with her.——It is very well, you are welcome to have nothing to do with her, but in the meantime her verse is the only French verse I ever read that I found agreeable; there is a neatness in it equal to that which we applaud with so much reason in the compositions of Prior. I have translated several of them, and shall proceed in my translations, till I have filled a Lilliputian paper-book I happen to have by me, which when filled I shall present to Mr. Bull. He is her passionate admirer, rode twenty miles to see her picture in the house of a stranger, which stranger politely insisted on his acceptance of it, and it now hangs over his parlour chimney. It is a striking portrait, too characteristic not to be a strong resemblance, and were it encompassed with a glory, instead of being dressed in a nun's hood, might pass for the face of an angel.

Our meadows are covered with a winter-flood in August; the rushes with which our bottomless chairs were to have been bottomed, and much hay which was not carried, are gone down the river on a voyage to Ely, and it is even uncertain whether they will ever return. *Sic transit gloria mundi*! . . . —Yours,

W. C.

To Lady Austen

To watch the storms, and hear the sky
Give all our almanacks the lie;
To shake with cold, and see the plains
In autumn drown'd with wintry rains;
'Tis thus I spend my moments here,
And wish myself a Dutch Mynheer;
I then should have no need of wit,
For lumpish Hollander unfit,
Nor should I then repine at mud,
Or meadows deluged with a flood;
But in a bog live well content,

And find it just my element;
Should be a clod, and not a man,
Nor wish in vain for Sister Ann,
With charitable aid to drag
My mind out of its proper quag;
Should have the genius of a boor,
And no ambition to have more.

My dear Sister—You see my beginning. I do not know but in time I may proceed even to the printing of halfpenny ballads.—Excuse the coarseness of my paper; I wasted such a quantity before I could accomplish anything legible, that I could not afford finer. I intend to employ an ingenious mechanic of the town to make me a longer case; for you may observe that my lines turn up their tails like Dutch mastiffs, so difficult do I find it to make the two halves exactly coincide with each other. We wait with impatience for the departure of this unseasonable flood. We think of you, and talk of you, but we can do no more, till the waters shall subside. I do not think our correspondence should drop because we are within a mile of each other. It is but an imaginary approximation, the flood having in reality as effectually parted us as if the British Channel rolled between us.—Yours, my dear Sister, with Mrs. Unwin's best love,

Aug. 12, 1782. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

[*No date.*]

My dear William—The modest terms in which you express yourself on the subject of Lady Austen's commendation embolden me to add my suffrage to hers, and to confirm it by assuring you that I think her just and well founded in her opinion of you. The compliment indeed glances at myself; for were you less than she accounts you, I ought not to afford you that place in my esteem which you have held so long. My own sagacity therefore and discernment are not a little concerned upon the occasion, for either you resemble the picture, or I have strangely mistaken my man, and formed an erroneous judgement of his character. With respect to your face and figure indeed, there I leave

the ladies to determine, as being naturally best qualified to decide the point; but whether you are perfectly the man of sense, and the gentleman, is a question in which I am as much interested as they, and which, you being my friend, I am of course prepared to settle in your favour. The lady (whom, when you know her as well, you will love as much as we do) is, and has been during the last fortnight, a part of our family. Before she was perfectly restored to health, she returned to Clifton. Soon after she came back, Mr. Jones had occasion to go to London. No sooner was he gone, than the château, being left without a garrison, was besieged as regularly as the night came on. Villains were both heard and seen in the garden, and at the doors and windows. The kitchen window in particular was attempted, from which they took a complete pane of glass, exactly opposite to the iron by which it was fastened; but providentially the window had been nailed to the wood-work, in order to keep it close, and that the air might be excluded; thus they were disappointed, and being discovered by the maid, withdrew. The ladies being worn out with continual watching, and repeated alarms, were at last prevailed upon to take refuge with us. Men furnished with firearms were put into the house, and the rascals, having intelligence of this circumstance, beat a retreat. Mr. Jones returned; Mrs. Jones and Miss Green, her daughter, left us, but Lady Austen's spirits having been too much disturbed to be able to repose in a place where she had been so much terrified, she was left behind. She remains with us till her lodgings at the vicarage can be made ready for her reception. I have now sent you what has occurred of moment in our history since my last.

I say amen, with all my heart, to your observation on religious characters. Men who profess themselves adepts in mathematical knowledge, in astronomy, or jurisprudence, are generally as well qualified as they would appear. The reason may be, that they are always liable to detection, should they attempt to impose upon mankind, and therefore take care to be

what they pretend. In religion alone, a profession is often slightly taken up, and slovenly carried on, because forsooth candour and charity require us to hope the best, and to judge favourably of our neighbour, and because it is easy to deceive the ignorant, who are a great majority, upon this subject. Let a man attach himself to a particular party, contend furiously for what are properly called evangelical doctrines, and enlist himself under the banner of some popular preacher, and the business is done. Behold a Christian! a Saint! a Phoenix!—In the meantime perhaps his heart, and his temper, and even his conduct, are unsanctified; possibly less exemplary than those of some avowed infidels. No matter!—he can talk,—he has the Shibboleth of the true church,—the Bible in his pocket, and a head well stored with notions. But the quiet, humble, modest, and peaceable person, who is in his practice what the other is only in his profession, who hates a noise, and therefore makes none, who knowing the snares that are in the world, keeps himself as much out of it as he can, and never enters it, but when duty calls, and even then with fear and trembling, is the Christian that will always stand highest in the estimation of those, who bring all characters to the test of true wisdom, and judge of the tree by its fruit.

You are desirous of visiting the prisoners; you wish to administer to their necessities, and to give them instruction. This task you will undertake, though you expect to encounter many things in the performance of it that will give you pain. Now *this* I can understand;—you will not listen to the sensibilities that distress yourself, but to the distresses of others. Therefore, when I meet with one of the specious praters above-mentioned, I will send him to Stock, that by your diffidence he may be taught a lesson of modesty; by your generosity, a little feeling for others; and by your general conduct, in short, to chatter less, and to do more.—Yours, my dear Friend,

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 4, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . You tell me that *John Gilpin* made you laugh tears, and that the ladies at court are delighted with my Poems. Much good may they do them! May they become as wise as the writer wishes them, and then they will be much happier than he! I know there is in the book that wisdom which cometh from above, because it was from above that I received it. May they receive it too! For whether they drink it out of the cistern, or whether it falls upon them immediately from the clouds, as it did on me, it is all one. It is the water of life, which whosoever drinketh shall thirst no more. As to the famous horseman above-mentioned, he and his feats are an inexhaustible source of merriment. At least we find him so, and seldom meet without refreshing ourselves with the recollection of them. You are perfectly at liberty to deal with them as you please. *Auctore tantùm anonymo imprimantur*; and when printed, send me a copy. . . .

Men really pious delight in doing good by stealth: but nothing less than an ostentatious display of bounty will satisfy mankind in general. I feel myself disposed to furnish you with an opportunity to shine in secret. We do what we can. But that *can* is little. You have rich friends, are eloquent on all occasions, and know how to be pathetic on a proper one. The winter will be severely felt at Olney by many, whose sobriety, industry, and honesty recommend them to charitable notice: and we think we could tell such persons as Mrs. Bouverie, or Mr. Smith, half a dozen tales of distress, that would find their way into hearts as feeling as theirs. You will do as you see good; and we in the meantime shall remain convinced that you will do your best. Lady Austen will no doubt do something; for she has great sensibility and compassion. . . .— Yours, my dear Unwin, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Nov. 11, 1782.

My dear Friend— . . . I am glad your health is such, that you have nothing more to complain of than may be expected on the downhill side of life. If mine is better than yours, it is to be attributed, I suppose, principally, to the constant enjoyment of country air and retirement; the most perfect regularity in matters of eating, drinking, and sleeping; and a happy emancipation from everything that wears the face of business. I lead the life I always wished for, and the single circumstance of dependence excepted (which, between ourselves, is very contrary to my predominant humour and disposition), have no want left broad enough for another wish to stand upon.

You may not, perhaps, live to see your trees attain to the dignity of timber;—I, nevertheless, approve of your planting, and the disinterested spirit that prompts you to it. Few people plant, when they are young; a thousand other less profitable amusements divert their attention; and most people, when the date of youth is once expired, think it too late to begin. I can tell you, however, for your comfort and encouragement, that when a grove, which Major Cowper had planted, was of eighteen years' growth, it was no small ornament to his grounds, and afforded as complete a shade as could be desired. Were I as old as your mother, in whose longevity I rejoice, and the more, because I consider it as, in some sort, a pledge and assurance of yours, and should come to the possession of land worth planting, I would begin to-morrow, and even without previously insisting upon a bond from Providence that I should live five years longer. . . .—Yours affectionately,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 18, 1782.

My dear William— . . . I little thought when I was writing the history of John Gilpin, that he would

appear in print—I intended to laugh, and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you were one. But now all the world laughs, at least if they have the same relish for a tale ridiculous in itself, and quaintly told, as we have.—Well—they do not always laugh so innocently, or at so small an expense—for in a world like this, abounding with subjects for satire, and with satirical wits to mark them, a laugh that hurts nobody has at least the grace of novelty to recommend it. Swift's darling motto was, *Vive la bagatelle*—a good wish for a philosopher of his complexion, the greater part of whose wisdom, whencesoever it came, most certainly came not from above. *La bagatelle* has no enemy in me, though it has neither so warm a friend, nor so able a one, as it had in him. If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity—a melancholy, that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written in the saddest mood, and, but for that saddest mood, perhaps had never been written at all. To say truth, it would be but a shocking vagary, should the mariners on board a ship buffeted by a terrible storm, employ themselves in fiddling and dancing; yet sometimes much such a part act I. . . .—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

To Mrs. Newton

Nov. 23, 1782.

My dear Madam— . . . The winter sets in with great severity. The rigour of the season, and the advanced price of grain, are very threatening to the poor. It is well with those that can feed upon a promise, and wrap themselves up warm in the robe of salvation. A good fireside and a well-spread table are but very indifferent substitutes for these better accommodations; so very indifferent, that I would gladly exchange them both, for the rags and the unsatisfied hunger of the poorest creature that looks forward with

hope to a better world, and weeps tears of joy in the midst of penury and distress. What a world is this! How mysteriously governed and, in appearance, left to itself. One man, having squandered thousands at a gaming-table, finds it convenient to travel; gives his estate to somebody to manage for him; amuses himself a few years in France and Italy; returns, perhaps, wiser than he went, having acquired knowledge which, but for his follies, he would never have acquired; again makes a splendid figure at home, shines in the senate, governs his country as its minister, is admired for his abilities, and, if successful, adored, at least by a party. When he dies he is praised as a demi-god, and his monument records everything but his vices. The exact contrast of such a picture is to be found in many cottages at Olney. I have no need to describe them; you know the characters I mean. They love God, they trust Him, they pray to Him in secret, and though He means to reward them openly, the day of recompense is delayed. In the meantime they suffer everything that infirmity and poverty can inflict upon them. Who would suspect, that has not a spiritual eye to discern it, that the fine gentleman was one whom his Maker had in abhorrence, and the wretch last-mentioned, dear to Him as the apple of His eye? It is no wonder that the world, who are not in the secret, find themselves obliged, some of them, to doubt a Providence, and others absolutely to deny it, when almost all the real virtue there is in it, is to be found living and dying in a state of neglected obscurity, and all the vices of others cannot exclude them from the privilege of worship and honour! But behind the curtain the matter is explained; very little, however, to the satisfaction of the great.

If you ask me why I have written thus, and to you especially, to whom there was no need to write thus, I can only reply, that having a letter to write, and no news to communicate, I picked up the first subject I found, and pursued it as far as was convenient for my purpose. . . .—Yours, my dear Madam, as ever,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

[*No date.*]

My dear William— . . . You tell me you have been asked if I am intent upon another volume? I reply,—not at present, not being convinced that I have met with sufficient encouragement. I account myself happy in having pleased a few, but am not rich enough to despise the many. I do not know what sort of market my commodity has found, but if a slack one, I must beware how I make a second attempt. My bookseller will not be willing to incur a certain loss; and I can as little afford it. Notwithstanding what I have said, I write, and am even now writing for the press. I told you that I had translated several of the poems of Madame Guyon. I told you too, or I am mistaken, that Mr. Bull designed to print them. That gentleman is gone to the seaside with Mrs. Wilberforce, and will be absent six weeks. My intention is to surprise him at his return with the addition of as much more translation as I have already given him. This however is still less likely to be a popular work than my former. Men that have no religion would despise it; and men that have no religious experience would not understand it. But the strain of simple and unaffected piety in the original is sweet beyond expression. She sings like an angel, and for that very reason has found but few admirers. . . .

W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Dec. 7, 1782.

My dear Friend—At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the teapot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the teacup descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream; limpid in its descent, but no sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring sillabub. This is the nineteenth winter since

I saw you in this situation; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine!—yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the meantime, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to be idle, when you can find an opportunity to be so; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathize with our friends who can.

The papers tell me that peace is at hand, and that it is at a great distance; that the siege of Gibraltar is abandoned, and that it is to be still continued. It is happy for me, that though I love my country, I have but little curiosity. There was a time when these contradictions would have distressed me, but I have learnt by experience that it is best for little people like myself to be patient, and to wait till time affords the intelligence which no speculations of theirs can ever furnish.

I thank you for a fine cod with oysters, and hope that ere long I shall have to thank you for procuring me Elliott's medicines. Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble lest, my Aesculapius being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost for ever. Adieu. My respects to Mrs. Hill.—Yours faithfully,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Jan. 19, 1783.

My dear William—From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement, we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement; not that our society is much multiplied,—the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's château. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions, and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant, and beg to be excused. . . .—Yours, my dear Friend,

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Jan. 26, 1783.

My dear Friend—It is reported among persons of the best intelligence at Olney—the barber, the schoolmaster, and the drummer of a corps quartered at this place—that the belligerent powers are at last reconciled, the articles of the treaty adjusted, and that peace is at the door. I saw this morning, at nine o'clock, a group of about twelve figures very closely engaged in a conference, as I suppose, upon the same subject. The scene of consultation was a blacksmith's shed, very comfortably screened from the wind, and directly opposed to the morning sun. Some held their hands behind them, some had them folded across their bosom, and others had thrust them into their breeches pockets. Every man's posture bespoke a pacific turn of mind; but the distance being too great for their words to reach me, nothing transpired. I am willing, however, to hope that the secret will not be a secret

long, and that you and I, equally interested in the event, though not, perhaps, equally well-informed, shall soon have an opportunity to rejoice in the completion of it. The powers of Europe have clashed with each other to a fine purpose; that the Americans, at length declared independent, may keep themselves so, if they can; and that what the parties, who have thought proper to dispute upon that point, have wrested from each other in the course of the conflict, may be, in the issue of it, restored to the proper owner. Nations may be guilty of a conduct that would render an individual infamous for ever; and yet carry their heads high, talk of their glory, and despise their neighbours. Your opinions and mine, I mean our political ones, are not exactly of a piece, yet I cannot think otherwise upon this subject than I have always done. England, more, perhaps, through the fault of her generals, than her councils, has in some instances acted with a spirit of cruel animosity she was never chargeable with till now. But this is the worst that can be said. On the other hand, the Americans, who, if they had contented themselves with a struggle for lawful liberty, would have deserved applause, seem to me to have incurred the guilt of parricide, by renouncing their parent, by making her ruin their favourite object, and by associating themselves with their worst enemy, for the accomplishment of their purpose. France, and of course Spain, have acted a treacherous, a thievish part. They have stolen America from England, and whether they are able to possess themselves of that jewel or not hereafter, it was doubtless what they intended. Holland appears to me in a meaner light than any of them. They quarrelled with a friend for an enemy's sake. The French led them by the nose, and the English have threshed them for suffering it. My views of the contest being, and having been always such, I have consequently brighter hopes for England than her situation some time since seemed to justify. She is the only injured party. America may, perhaps, call her the aggressor; but if

she were so, America has not only repelled the injury, but done a greater. As to the rest, if perfidy, treachery, avarice, and ambition, can prove their cause to have been a rotten one, those proofs are found upon them. I think, therefore, that whatever scourge may be prepared for England, on some future day, her ruin is not yet to be expected.

Acknowledge, now, that I am worthy of a place under the shed I described, and that I should make no small figure among the *quidnuncs* of Olney. . . .— Yours, my dear Friend, as ever, W. C.

To Joseph Hill Esq.

Feb. 20, 1783.

My dear Friend— . . . I have been refreshing myself with a walk in the garden, where I find that January (who according to Chaucer was the husband of May) being dead, February has married the widow. —Yours, &c. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

March 30, 1783.

My dear Friend— . . . The sturgeon was incomparable, the best we ever had. We like both sturgeon and salmon, but choose the former as the more durable commodity of the two, thanking you at the same time for your bounty.

To dispatch your questions first, which are of more importance than any subject that is likely to occur at present, will be both the civilest and the wisest course. Walnut shells, skilfully perforated, and bound over the eyes, are esteemed a good remedy for squinting; the pupil naturally seeking its light at the aperture, becomes at length habituated to a just position. But to alleviate your anxiety upon this subject, I have heard good judges of beauty declare that they thought a slight distortion of the eye in a pretty face rather advantageous.

The figure, however, cannot be good if the legs do not stand perpendicular to the person; knock-knees, therefore, must be corrected if they can. It is, I suppose, a case of weakness. I should therefore recommend the cold bath as a strengthener, and riding on horseback, as soon as the boy is capable of it, as a means of forcing their knees into their proper line. Their pressure against the saddle will naturally push them outwards, and accordingly you may frequently observe the legs of persons habituated from their infancy to this sort of exercise, curved almost into an arch: witness half the jockeys and postilions in the kingdom. The more the little man is made to turn the point of his toe inward when he is riding, I suppose the better. . . .—Yours ever, with our united love, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

April 5, 1783.

My dear Friend—When one has a letter to write, there is nothing more useful than to make a beginning. In the first place, because unless it be begun, there is no good reason to hope it will ever be ended; and secondly, because the beginning is half the business; it being much more difficult to put the pen in motion at first, than to continue the progress of it, when once moved.—My dear Friend, truly yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Bull

June 3, 1783.

My dear Friend—My greenhouse, fronted with myrtles, and where I hear nothing but the pattering of a fine shower and the sound of distant thunder, wants only the fumes of your pipe to make it perfectly delightful. Tobacco was not known in the golden age. So much the worse for the golden age. This age of iron, or lead, would be insupportable without it; and

therefore we may reasonably suppose that the happiness of those better days would have been much improved by the use of it. We hope that you and your son are perfectly recovered. The season has been most unfavourable to animal life; and I, who am merely animal, have suffered much by it.

Though I should be glad to write, I write little or nothing. The time for such fruit is not yet come; but I expect it, and I wish for it. I want amusement; and, deprived of that, have none to supply the place of it. I send you, however, according to my promise to send you everything, two stanzas composed at the request of Lady Austen. She wanted words to a tune she much admired, and I gave her these on Peace.—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

June 8, 1783.

My dear William—Our severest winter, commonly called the spring, is now over, and I find myself seated in my favourite recess, the greenhouse. In such a situation, so silent, so shady, where no human foot is heard, and where only my myrtles presume to peep in at the window, you may suppose I have no interruption to complain of, and that my thoughts are perfectly at my command. But the beauties of the spot are themselves an interruption; my attention is called upon by those very myrtles, by a double row of grass pinks just beginning to blossom, and by a bed of beans already in bloom; and you are to consider it, if you please, as no small proof of my regard, that though you have so many powerful rivals, I disengage myself from them all, and devote this hour entirely to you.

You are not acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Bull, of Newport; perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A

dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it,—an imagination which, when he finds himself in the company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party. At other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either; it can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco. Nothing is perfect,—

Nihil est ab omni
Parte beatum.

. . . Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Bull

June 27, 1783.

My dear Friend—A fine morning, though a shady one, has induced me to spend that time in walking which I had devoted to the quill; consequently I send you no letter for Mr. Newton, but am obliged to postpone my answer to his last till the usual opportunity shall arrive. I cannot resist fine weather; and the omission is of no great consequence, both because I have nothing new to communicate, and because I have a frank which will convey that nothing to him gratis. I wish you and yours a pleasant excursion, as pleasant as the season and the scene to which you are going can possibly make it. I shall rejoice to hear from you, and am sufficiently flattered by the recollection, that just after hearing your protest against all letter-writing, I heard you almost promise to write a letter to me. The journeys of a man like you must

be all sentimental journeys, and better worth the recital than Sterne's would have been, had he travelled to this moment. Adieu, my Friend !—Yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. John Newton

July 27, 1783.

My dear Friend—You cannot have more pleasure in receiving a letter from me, than I should find in writing it, were it not almost impossible in such a place to find a subject.

I live in a world abounding with incidents, upon which many grave, and perhaps some profitable observations might be made; but those incidents never reaching my unfortunate ears, both the entertaining narrative and the reflection it might suggest are to me annihilated and lost. I look back to the past week, and say, what did it produce? I ask the same question of the week preceding, and duly receive the same answer from both,—nothing !—A situation like this, in which I am as unknown to the world, as I am ignorant of all that passes in it, in which I have nothing to do but to think, would exactly suit me, were my subjects of meditation as agreeable as my leisure is uninterrupted. My passion for retirement is not at all abated, after so many years spent in the most sequestered state, but rather increased ;—a circumstance I should esteem wonderful to a degree not to be accounted for, considering the condition of my mind, did I not know, that we think as we are made to think, and of course approve and prefer, as Providence, who appoints the bounds of our habitation, chooses for us. Thus am I both free and a prisoner at the same time. The world is before me; I am not shut up in the Bastille; there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates, of which I have not the key ;—but an invisible, uncontrollable agency, a local attachment, an inclination more forcible than I ever felt, even to the place of my birth, serves me

for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. In former years I have known sorrow, and before I had ever tasted of spiritual trouble. The effect was an abhorrence of the scene in which I had suffered so much, and a weariness to those objects which I had so long looked at with an eye of despondency and dejection. But it is otherwise with me now. The same cause subsisting, and in a much more powerful degree, fails to produce its natural effect. The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting. But so it is, and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of *Him* that placed me in it.—

> Iste terrarum mihi praeter omnes
> Angulus ridet.

It is the place of all the world I love the most, not for any happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable with most convenience to myself and with the least disturbance to others.

You wonder, and (I dare say) unfeignedly, because you do not think yourself entitled to such praise, that I prefer your style, as an historian, to that of the two most renowned writers of history the present day has seen. That you may not suspect me of having said more than my real opinion will warrant, I will tell you why. In your style I see no affectation. In every line of theirs I see nothing else. They disgust me always, Robertson with his pomp and his strut, and Gibbon with his finical and French manners. You are as correct as they. You express yourself with as much precision. Your words are ranged with as much propriety, but you do not set your periods to a

tune. They discover a perpetual desire to exhibit themselves to advantage, whereas your subject engrosses you. They sing, and you say; which, as history is a thing to be said, and not sung, is, in my judgement, very much to your advantage. A writer that despises their tricks, and is yet neither inelegant nor inharmonious, proves himself, by that single circumstance, a man of superior judgement and ability to them both. You have my reasons. I honour a manly character, in which good sense, and a desire of doing good, are the predominant features;—but affectation is an emetic. W. C.

To the Rev. William Bull

Aug. 3, 1783.

My dear Bull— . . . I was always an admirer of thunder-storms, even before I knew whose voice I heard in them; but especially an admirer of thunder rolling over the great waters. There is something singularly majestic in the sound of it at sea, where the eye and the ear have uninterrupted opportunity of observation, and the concavity above being made spacious reflects it with more advantage. I have consequently envied you your situation, and the enjoyment of those refreshing breezes that belong to it. We have indeed been regaled with some of these bursts of ethereal music.—The peals have been as loud, by the report of a gentleman who lived many years in the West Indies, as were ever heard in those islands, and the flashes as splendid. But when the thunder preaches, an horizon bounded by the ocean is the only sounding-board. . . . —Yours, my dear Friend, Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

August 4, 1783.

My dear William— . . . The ballad is a species of poetry, I believe, peculiar to this country, equally

adapted to the drollest and the most tragical subjects. Simplicity and ease are its proper characteristics. Our forefathers excelled in it; but we moderns have lost the art. It is observed, that we have few good English odes. But to make amends, we have many excellent ballads, not inferior perhaps in true poetical merit to some of the very best odes that the Greek or Latin languages have to boast of. It is a sort of composition I was ever fond of, and if graver matters had not called me another way, should have addicted myself to it more than to any other. I inherit a taste for it from my father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that way were produced. What can be prettier than Gay's ballad, or rather Swift's, Arbuthnot's, Pope's, and Gay's, in the What do ye call it—'Twas when the seas were roaring?' I have been well informed that they all contributed, and that the most celebrated association of clever fellows this country ever saw did not think it beneath them to unite their strength and abilities in the composition of a song. The success however answered to their wishes, and our puny days will never produce such another. The ballads that Bourne has translated, beautiful in themselves, are still more beautiful in his version of them, infinitely surpassing, in my judgement, all that Ovid or Tibullus have left behind them. They are quite as elegant, and far more touching and pathetic than the tenderest strokes of either.

So much for ballads, and ballad-writers. 'A worthy subject,' you will say, 'for a man whose head might be filled with better things';—and *it is* filled with better things, but to so ill a purpose, that I thrust into it all manner of topics that may prove more amusing; as for instance, I have two goldfinches, which in the summer occupy the greenhouse. A few days since, being employed in cleaning out their cages, I placed that which I had in hand upon the table, while the other hung against the wall: the windows and the doors stood wide open. I went to fill the fountain at

the pump, and on my return was not a little surprised to find a goldfinch sitting on the top of the cage I had been cleaning, and singing to and kissing the goldfinch within. I approached him, and he discovered no fear; still nearer, and he discovered none. I advanced my hand towards him, and he took no notice of it. I seized him, and supposed I had caught a new bird, but casting my eye upon the other cage perceived my mistake. Its inhabitant, during my absence, had contrived to find an opening, where the wire had been a little bent, and made no other use of the escape it afforded him, than to salute his friend, and to converse with him more intimately than he had done before. I returned him to his proper mansion, but in vain. In less than a minute he had thrust his little person through the aperture again, and again perched upon his neighbour's cage, kissing him, as at the first, and singing, as if transported with the fortunate adventure. I could not but respect such friendship, as for the sake of its gratification had twice declined an opportunity to be free, and, consenting to their union, resolved that for the future one cage should hold them both. I am glad of such incidents; for at a pinch, and when I need entertainment, the versification of them serves to divert me. . . .—Yours ever, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Sept. 23, 1783.

My dear Friend— . . . Since you went, we dined with Mr. Bull at Newport. I had sent him notice of our visit a week before, which, like a contemplative, studious man, as he is, he put in his pocket and forgot. When we arrived, the parlour windows were shut, and the house had the appearance of being uninhabited. After waiting some time, however, the maid opened the door, and the master presented himself. Mrs. Bull and her son were gone to Bedford, but having found what we chiefly wanted, we dined and spent the afternoon

together comfortably enough. It is hardly worth while to observe so repeatedly that his garden seems a spot contrived only for the growth of melancholy; but being always affected by it in the same way I cannot help it. He showed me a nook, in which he had placed a bench, and where he said he found it very refreshing to smoke his pipe and meditate. Here he sits, with his back against one brick wall, and his nose against another, which must, you know, be very refreshing, and greatly assist meditation. He rejoices the more in this niche, because it is an acquisition made at some expense, and with no small labour; several loads of earth were removed in order to make it,—which loads of earth, had I the management of them, I should carry thither again, and fill up a place more fit in appearance to be a repository for the dead than the living. I would on no account put any man out of conceit with his innocent enjoyments, and therefore never tell him my thoughts upon this subject; but he is not seldom low-spirited, and I cannot but suspect that his situation helps to make him so. . . .—Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Oct. 20, 1783.

. . . I see the winter approaching without much concern, though a passionate lover of fine weather and the pleasant scenes of summer; but the long evenings have their comforts too, and there is hardly to be found upon the earth, I suppose, so snug a creature as an Englishman by his fireside in the winter. I mean however an Englishman that lives in the country, for in London it is not very easy to avoid intrusion. I have two ladies to read to, sometimes more, but never less. At present we are circumnavigating the globe, and I find the old story with which I amused myself some years since, through the great felicity of a memory not very retentive, almost new. I am however sadly at a loss for Cook's voyage, can you send it? I shall be glad

of Foster's too. These together will make the winter pass merrily, and you will much oblige me.

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Nov. 3, 1783.

My dear Friend—My time is short, and my opportunity not the most favourable. My letter will consequently be short likewise, and perhaps not very intelligible. I find it no very easy matter to bring my mind into that degree of composure, which is necessary to the arrangement either of words or matter. You will naturally expect to receive some account of this confusion that I describe, some reason given for it.—On Saturday night, at eleven o'clock, when I had not been in bed five minutes, I was alarmed by a cry of fire, announced by two or three shrill screams upon our staircase. Our servants, who were going to bed, saw it from their windows, and in appearance so near, that they thought our house in danger. I immediately rose, and putting by the curtain, saw sheets of fire rising above the ridge of Mr. Palmer's house, opposite to ours. The deception was such, that I had no doubt it had begun with *him*, but soon found that it was rather farther off. In fact, it was at three places;—in the outhouses belonging to George Griggs, Lucy and Abigail Tyrrel. Having broke out in three different parts, it is supposed to have been maliciously kindled. A tar-barrel and a quantity of tallow made a most tremendous blaze, and the buildings it had seized upon being all thatched, the appearance became every moment more formidable. Providentially, the night was perfectly calm; so calm that candles without lanterns, of which there were multitudes in the street, burnt as steadily as in a house. By four in the morning it was so far reduced, that all danger seemed to be over; but the confusion it had occasioned was almost infinite. Every man who supposed his dwelling-house in jeopardy, emptied it as fast as he could, and conveyed

his moveables to the house of some neighbour, supposed to be more secure. Ours, in the space of two hours, was so filled with all sorts of lumber, that we had not even room for a chair by the fireside. George Griggs is the principal sufferer. He gave eighteen guineas, or nearly that sum, to a woman whom, in his hurry, he mistook for his wife; but the supposed wife walked off with the money, and he will probably never recover it. He has likewise lost forty pounds' worth of wool. London never exhibited a scene of greater depredation, drunkenness, and riot. Everything was stolen that could be got at, and every drop of liquor drunk that was not guarded. Only one thief has yet been detected; a woman of the name of J——, who was stopped by young Handscomb with an apron full of plunder. He was forced to strike her down, before he could wrest it from her. Could you visit the place, you would see a most striking proof of a Providence interposing to stop the progress of the flames. They had almost reached, that is to say, within six yards of Daniel Raban's wood-pile, in which were fifty-pounds' worth of faggots and furze; and exactly there they were extinguished; otherwise, especially if a breath of air had happened to move, all that side of the town must probably have been consumed. After all this dreadful conflagration, we find nothing burnt but the out-houses; and the dwellings to which they belonged have suffered only the damage of being unroofed on that side next the fire. No lives were lost, nor any limbs broken. Mrs. Unwin, whose spirits served her while the hubbub lasted, and the day after, begins to feel the effect of it now. But I hope she will be relieved from it soon, being better this evening than I expected. As for me, I am impregnable to all such assaults. I have nothing, however, but this subject in my mind, and it is in vain that I invite any other into it. Having, therefore, exhausted this, I finish, assuring you of our united love, and hoping to find myself in a frame of mind more suited to my employment when I write next.—

Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 10, 1783.

My dear William— . . . I suspect you of being too sedentary. 'You cannot walk.' Why you cannot is best known to yourself. I am sure your legs are long enough, and your person does not overload them. But I beseech you ride, and ride often. I think I have heard you say, you cannot even do that without an object. Is not health an object? Is not a new prospect, which in most countries is gained at the end of every mile, an object? Assure yourself that easy-chairs are no friends to cheerfulness, and that a long winter spent by the fireside is a prelude to an unhealthy spring. Everything I see in the fields is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life, with new pleasure. This indeed is partly the effect of a natural taste for rural beauty, and partly the effect of habit; for I never in all my life have let slip the opportunity of breathing fresh air, and of conversing with nature, when I could fairly catch it. I earnestly recommend a cultivation of the same taste to you, suspecting that you have neglected it, and suffer for doing so.

Last Saturday se'nnight, the moment I had composed myself in my bed, your mother too having just got into hers, we were alarmed by a cry of fire on the staircase. I immediately rose, and saw sheets of flame above the roof of Mr. Palmer's house, our opposite neighbour. The mischief however was not so near to him as it seemed to be, having begun in a butcher's yard, at a little distance. We made all haste down-stairs, and soon threw open the street door, for the reception of as much lumber, of all sorts, as our house would hold, brought into it by several who thought it necessary to move their furniture. In two hours' time we had so much that we could hold no more, even the uninhabited part of our building being filled. Not that we ourselves were entirely secure—an adjoining thatch, on which fell showers of sparks, being rather

a dangerous neighbour. Providentially, however, the night was perfectly calm, and we escaped. By four in the morning it was extinguished, having consumed many out-buildings, but no dwelling-house. Your mother suffered a little in her health, from the fatigue and bustle of the night, but soon recovered. As for me, it hurt me not. The slightest wind would have carried the fire to the very extremity of the town, there being multitudes of thatched buildings and faggot-piles so near to each other, that they must have proved infallible conductors.

The balloons prosper: and I congratulate you upon it. Thanks to Montgolfier, we shall fly at last.— Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Nov. 17, 1783.

My dear Friend— . . . The country around us is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds, and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated as to have placed a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Some madman or some devil has broke loose, who it is to be hoped will pay dear for these effusions of his malignity. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice, for depredation; Sue Riviss, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you will remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having

filled her apron with wearing apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had Billy Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he good-naturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones, is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some ironwork, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipt, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable Hinschcomb, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to still harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver-end, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapt his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for an old pair of breeches. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not

to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat him much; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

Swift observes, when he is giving his reasons why the preacher is elevated always above his hearers, that let the crowd be as great as it will below, there is always room enough overhead. If the French philosophers can carry their art of flying to the perfection they desire, the observation may be reversed, the crowd will be overhead, and they will have most room who stay below. I can assure you, however, upon my own experience, that this way of travelling is very delightful. I dreamt, a night or two since, that I drove myself through the upper regions in a balloon and pair, with the greatest ease and security. Having finished the tour I intended, I made a short turn, and, with one flourish of my whip, descended; my horses prancing and curvetting with an infinite share of spirit, but without the least danger, either to me or my vehicle. The time, we may suppose, is at hand, and seems to be prognosticated by my dream, when these airy excursions will be universal, when judges will fly the circuit, and bishops their visitations; and when the tour of Europe will be performed with much greater speed, and with equal advantage, by all who travel merely for the sake of having it to say, that they have made it. . . .—Yours, my dear Friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 24, 1783.

My dear William— . . . L'Estrange's Josephus has lately furnished us with evening lectures. But the historian is so tediously circumstantial, and the trans-

lator so insupportably coarse and vulgar, that we are all three weary of him. How would Tacitus have shone upon such a subject, great master as he was of the art of description, concise without obscurity, and affecting without being poetical. But so it was ordered, and for wise reasons no doubt, that the greatest calamities any people ever suffered, and an accomplishment of one of the most signal prophecies in the Scripture, should be recorded by one of the worst writers. The man was a temporizer too, and courted the favour of his Roman masters at the expense of his own creed; or else an infidel, and absolutely disbelieved it. You will think me very difficult to please; I quarrel with Josephus for the want of elegance, and with some of our modern historians for having too much. With him, for running right forward like a gazette, without stopping to make a single observation by the way; and with them, for pretending to delineate characters that existed two thousand years ago, and to discover the motives by which they were influenced, with the same precision as if they had been their contemporaries. Simplicity is become a very rare quality in a writer. In the decline of great kingdoms, and where refinement in all the arts is carried to an excess, I suppose it is always rare. The latter Roman writers are remarkable for false ornament, they were yet no doubt admired by the readers of their own day; and with respect to authors of the present era, the most popular among them appear to me equally censurable on the same account. Swift and Addison were simple; Pope knew how to be so, but was frequently tinged with affectation; since their day I hardly know a celebrated writer who deserves the character. But your mother wants room for a postscript, so my lecture must conclude abruptly.—Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin [*No date.*]

My dear Friend—It is hard upon us striplings who have uncles still living (N.B. I myself have an uncle

still alive), that those venerable gentlemen should stand in our way, even when the ladies are in question; that I, for instance, should find in one page of your letter a hope that Miss Shuttleworth would be of your party, and be told in the next that she is engaged to your uncle. Well, we may perhaps never be uncles; but we may reasonably hope that the time is coming, when others, as young as we are now, shall envy us the privileges of old age, and see us engross that share in the attention of the ladies to which their youth must aspire in vain. Make our compliments if you please to your sister Elizabeth, and tell her that we are both mortified at having missed the pleasure of seeing her.

Balloons are so much the mode, that even in this country we have attempted a balloon. You may possibly remember that at a place called Weston, little more than a mile from Olney, there lives a family whose name is Throckmorton. The present possessor of the estate is a young man whom I remember a boy. He has a wife, who is young, genteel, and handsome. They are Papists, but much more amiable than many Protestants. We never had any intercourse with the family, though ever since we lived here we have enjoyed the range of their pleasure grounds, having been favoured with a key, which admits us into all. When this man succeeded to the estate, on the death of his elder brother, and came to settle at Weston, I sent him a complimentary card, requesting the continuance of that privilege, having till then enjoyed it by the favour of his mother, who on that occasion went to finish her days at Bath. You may conclude that he granted it, and for about two years nothing more passed between us. A fortnight ago, I received an invitation in the civilest terms, in which he told me that the next day he should attempt to fill a balloon, and if it would be any pleasure to me to be present, should be happy to see me. Your mother and I went. The whole country were there, but the balloon could not be filled. The endeavour was, I believe, very philosophically made, but such a process depends for

its success upon such niceties as make it very precarious. Our reception was however flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us, than we could possibly have expected; indeed rather more than of any of his other guests. They even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged. A day or two afterwards, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree that I thought would shelter us both,—a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one. A few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house, and exchanged bows and curtsies at a little distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belonging to the courtyard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily toward us; we made equal haste to meet him, he presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less, than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part, as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call, and now and then to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way, neither our house, furniture,

servants, or income, being such as qualify us to make entertainments; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry, which must be the consequence of our dining there, there not being a man in the country, except himself, with whom I could endure to associate. They are squires, merely such, purse-proud and sportsmen. But Mr. T. is altogether a man of fashion, and respectable on every account.

I have told you a long story. Farewell. We number the days as they pass, and are glad that we shall see you and your sister soon.—Yours, &c.

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Nov. 30, 1783.

My dear Friend—I have neither long visits to pay nor to receive, nor ladies to spend hours in telling me that which might be told in five minutes, yet often find myself obliged to be an economist of time, and to make the most of a short opportunity. Let our station be as retired as it may, there is no want of playthings and avocations, nor much need to seek them, in this world of ours. Business, or what presents itself to us under that imposing character, will find us out, even in the stillest retreat, and plead its importance, however trivial in reality, as a just demand upon our attention. It is wonderful how by means of such real or seeming necessities, my time is stolen away. I have just time to observe that time is short, and by the time I have made the observation, time is gone. I have wondered in former days at the patience of the antediluvian world; that they could endure a life almost millenary, with so little variety as seems to have fallen to their share. It is probable that they had much fewer employments than we. Their affairs lay in a narrower compass; their libraries were indifferently furnished; philosophical researches were carried on with much less industry and acuteness of penetration, and fiddles, perhaps, were not even invented. How then could

seven or eight hundred years of life be supportable? I have asked this question formerly, and been at a loss to resolve it; but I think I can answer it now. I will suppose myself born a thousand years before Noah was born or thought of. I rise with the sun; I worship; I prepare my breakfast; I swallow a bucket of goats' milk, and a dozen good sizeable cakes. I fasten a new string to my bow, and my youngest boy, a lad of about thirty years of age, having played with my arrows till he has stript off all the feathers, I find myself obliged to repair them. The morning is thus spent in preparing for the chase, and it is become necessary that I should dine. I dig up my roots; I wash them; I boil them; I find them not done enough; I boil them again; my wife is angry; we dispute; we settle the point; but in the meantime the fire goes out, and must be kindled again. All this is very amusing. I hunt; I bring home the prey; with the skin of it I mend an old coat, or I make a new one. By this time the day is far spent; I feel myself fatigued, and retire to rest. Thus what with tilling the ground and eating the fruit of it, hunting and walking, and running, and mending old clothes, and sleeping and rising again, I can suppose an inhabitant of the primaeval world so much occupied, as to sigh over the shortness of life, and to find at the end of many centuries, that they had all slipt through his fingers, and were passed away like a shadow. What wonder then that I, who live in a day of so much greater refinement, when there is so much more to be wanted, and wished, and to be enjoyed, should feel myself now and then pinched in point of opportunity, and at some loss for leisure to fill four sides of a sheet like this? Thus, however, it is, and if the ancient gentlemen to whom I have referred, and their complaints of the disproportion of time to the occasions they had for it, will not serve me as an excuse, I must even plead guilty, and confess that I am often in haste, when I have no good reason for being so. . . .—Your affectionate

WM. COWPER.

To the Rev. John Newton

Dec. 15, 1783.

My dear Friend—I know not how it fares with you, at a time when philosophy has just brought forth her most extraordinary production, not excepting, perhaps, that prodigy, a ship, in all respects complete, and equal to the task of circumnavigating the globe. My mind, however, is frequently getting into these balloons, and is busy in multiplying speculations as airy as the regions through which they pass. The last account from France, which seems so well authenticated, has changed my jocularity upon this occasion into serious expectation. The invention of these new vehicles is yet in its infancy, yet already they seem to have attained a degree of perfection which navigation did not reach, till ages of experience had matured it, and science had exhausted both her industry and her skill, in its improvement. I am aware, indeed, that the first boat or canoe that was ever formed, though rude in its construction—perhaps not constructed at all, being only a hollow tree that had fallen casually in the water, and which, though furnished with neither sails nor oars, might yet be guided by a pole—was a more perfect creature in its kind than a balloon at present; the single circumstance of its manageable nature giving it a clear superiority both in respect of safety and convenience. But the atmosphere, though a much thinner medium, we well know, resists the impression made upon it by the tail of a bird, as effectually as the water that of a ship's rudder. Pope, when inculcating one of his few useful lessons, and directing mankind to the providence of God as the true source of all their wisdom, says beautifully—

> Learn of the little Nautilus to sail,
> Spread the thin oar, and catch the driving gale.

It is easy to parody these lines, so as to give them an accommodation and suitableness to the present purpose.

> Learn of the circle-making kite to fly,
> Spread the fan-tail, and wheel about the sky.

It is certain, at least, that nothing within the reach of human ingenuity will be left unattempted to accomplish, and add all that is wanting to this last effort of philosophical contrivance. The approximating powers of the telescope, and the powers by which the thunderstorm is delivered of its contents peaceably and without mischief, were once, perhaps, in appearance more remote from discovery, and seemed less practicable, than we may now suppose it to give direction to that which is already buoyant; especially possessed as we are of such consummate mechanical skill, already masters of principles which we have nothing to do but to apply, of which we have already availed ourselves in the similar case of navigation, and having in every fowl of the air a pattern, which now at length it may be sufficient to imitate. Wings and a tail, indeed, were of little use, while the body, so much heavier than the space of air it occupied, was sure to sink by its own weight, and could never be held in equipoise by any implements of the kind which human strength could manage. But now we float; at random, indeed, pretty much, and as the wind drives us; for want of nothing, however, but that steerage which invention, the conqueror of many equal, if not superior difficulties, may be expected to supply.—Should the point be carried, and man at last become as familiar with the air as he has long been with the ocean, will it in its consequences prove a mercy, or a judgement? I think, a judgement. First, because if a power to convey himself from place to place, like a bird, would have been good for him, his Maker would have formed him with such a capacity. But he has been a groveller upon the earth for six thousand years, and now at last, when the close of this present state of things approaches, begins to exalt himself above it. So much the worse for *him*. Like a truant schoolboy, he breaks his bounds, and will have reason to repent of his presumption.—Secondly, I think it will prove a judgement, because with the exercise of very little foresight, it is easy to prognosticate a thousand evils which the project must necessarily bring

after it; amounting at last to the confusion of all order, the annihilation of all authority, with dangers both to property and person, and impunity to the offenders. Were I an absolute legislator, I would therefore make it death for a man to be convicted of flying, the moment he could be caught; and to bring him down from his altitudes by a bullet sent through his head or his carriage, should be no murder. Philosophers would call me a Vandal; the scholar would say that, had it not been for me, the fable of Daedalus would have been realized; and historians would load my memory with reproaches of phlegm, and stupidity, and oppression; but in the meantime the world would go on quietly, and if it enjoyed less liberty, would at least be more secure. . . .—Nous sommes les vôtres,

GUILLAUME ET MARIE.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Feb. 10, 1784.

My dear Friend—The morning is my writing time, and in the morning I have no spirits. So much the worse for my correspondents. Sleep, that refreshes my body, seems to cripple me in every other respect. As the evening approaches, I grow more alert, and when I am retiring to bed, am more fit for mental occupation than at any other time. So it fares with us whom they call nervous. By a strange inversion of the animal economy, we are ready to sleep when we have most need to be awake, and go to bed just when we might sit up to some purpose. The watch is irregularly wound up, it goes in the night when it is not wanted, and in the day stands still. In many respects we have the advantage of our forefathers the Picts. We sleep in a whole skin and are not obliged to submit to the painful operation of puncturing ourselves from head to foot, in order that we may be decently dressed, and fit to appear abroad. But on the other hand, we have reason enough to envy them their tone of nerves, and that flow of spirits which effectually

secured them from all uncomfortable impressions of a gloomy atmosphere, and from every shade of melancholy from every other cause. They understood, I suppose, the use of vulnerary herbs, having frequent occasion for some skill in surgery; but physicians, I presume, they had none, having no need of any. Is it possible, that a creature like myself can be descended from such progenitors, in whom there appears not a single trace of family resemblance? What an alteration have a few ages made? They, without clothing, would defy the severest season; and I, with all the accommodations that art has since invented, am hardly secure even in the mildest. If the wind blows upon me when my pores are open, I catch cold. A cough is the consequence. I suppose if such a disorder could have seized a Pict, his friends would have concluded that a bone had stuck in his throat, and that he was in some danger of choking. They would perhaps have addressed themselves to the cure of his cough by thrusting their fingers into his gullet, which would only have exasperated the case. But they would never have thought of administering laudanum, my only remedy. For this difference however that has obtained between me and my ancestors, I am indebted to the luxurious practices, and enfeebling self-indulgence, of a long line of grandsires, who from generation to generation have been employed in deteriorating the breed, till at last the collected effects of all their follies have centred in my puny self,—a man indeed, but not in the image of those that went before me;—a man, who sighs and groans, who wears out life in dejection and oppression of spirits, and who never thinks of the aborigines of the country to which he belongs, without wishing that he had been born among them. The evil is without a remedy, unless the ages that are passed could be recalled, my whole pedigree be permitted to live again, and being properly admonished to beware of enervating sloth and refinement, would preserve their hardiness of nature unimpaired, and transmit the desirable quality to their posterity.

I once saw Adam in a dream. We sometimes say of a picture, that we doubt not its likeness to the original, though we never saw him; a judgement we have some reason to form, when the face is strongly charactered, and the features full of expression. So I think of my visionary Adam, and for a similar reason. His figure was awkward indeed in the extreme. It was evident that he had never been taught by a Frenchman to hold his head erect, or to turn out his toes; to dispose gracefully of his arms, or to simper without a meaning. But if Mr. Bacon was called upon to produce a statue of Hercules, he need not wish for a juster pattern. He stood like a rock; the size of his limbs, the prominence of his muscles, and the height of his stature, all conspired to bespeak him a creature whose strength had suffered no diminution; and who, being the first of his race, did not come into the world under a necessity of sustaining a load of infirmities, derived to him from the intemperance of others. He was as much stouter than a Pict, as I suppose a Pict to have been than I. Upon my hypothesis, therefore, there has been a gradual declension, in point of bodily vigour, from Adam down to me: at least if my dream were a just representation of that gentleman, and deserve the credit I cannot help giving it, such must have been the case.—Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

March 19, 1784.

My dear Friend— . . . I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company; but I will venture to say that it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful. I am often so; always, indeed, when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. But the effect of such continual listening to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted, is, that

I can never give much more than half my attention to what is started by others, and very rarely start anything myself. My silence, however, and my absence of mind, make me sometimes as entertaining as if I had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good-natured raillery; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it. But you will easily perceive that a mind thus occupied is but indifferently qualified for the consideration of theological matters. The most useful and the most delightful topics of that kind are to me forbidden fruit;—I tremble if I approach them. It has happened to me sometimes that I have found myself imperceptibly drawn in, and made a party in such discourse. The consequence has been, dissatisfaction and self-reproach. You will tell me, perhaps, that I have written upon these subjects in verse, and may, therefore, if I please, in prose. But there is a difference. The search after poetical expression, the rhyme, and the numbers, are all affairs of some difficulty; they amuse, indeed, but are not to be attained without study, and engross, perhaps, a larger share of the attention than the subject itself. Persons fond of music will sometimes find pleasure in the tune, when the words afford them none. There are, however, subjects that do not always terrify me by their importance; such, I mean, as relate to Christian life and manners; and when such an one presents itself, and finds me in a frame of mind that does not absolutely forbid the employment, I shall most readily give it my attention, for the sake, however, of your request merely. Verse is my favourite occupation, and what I compose in that way, I reserve for my own use hereafter.

My evenings are devoted to books. I read aloud for the entertainment of the party, thus making amends by a vociferation of two hours for my silence at other times.

I have lately finished eight volumes of Johnson's Prefaces, or Lives of the Poets. In all that number I observe but one man,—a poet of no great fame,—of

whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there, whose mind seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death, he was found at his lodgings in Islington by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson, 'I have but one book, but it is the best.' Of him, therefore, there are some hopes. But from the lives of all the rest there is but one inference to be drawn:—that poets are a very worthless, wicked set of people. . . .—Yours, my dear Friends, truly, WM. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

March 21, 1784.

My dear William— . . . Last night I made an end of reading Johnson's Prefaces; but the number of poets whom he has vouchsafed to chronicle being fifty-six, there must be many with whose history I am not yet acquainted. These, or some of these, if it suits you to give them a part of your chaise, when you come, will be heartily welcome. I am very much the biographer's humble admirer. His uncommon share of good sense, and his forcible expression, secure to him that tribute from all his readers. He has a penetrating insight into character, and a happy talent of correcting the popular opinion, upon all occasions where it is erroneous; and this he does with the boldness of a man who will think for himself, but, at the same time, with a justness of sentiment that convinces us he does not differ from others through affectation, but because he has a sounder judgement. This remark, however, has his narrative for its object, rather than his critical performance. In the latter, I do not think him always just, when he departs from the general opinion. He finds no beauties in Milton's *Lycidas*. He pours contempt upon Prior, to such a degree, that were he really as undeserving of notice as he represents

him, he ought no longer to be numbered among the poets. These, indeed, are the two capital instances in which he has offended me. There are others less important, which I have not room to enumerate, and in which I am less confident that he is wrong. What suggested to him the thought that the *Alma* was written in imitation of *Hudibras*, I cannot conceive. In former years, they were both favourites of mine, and I often read them; but never saw in them the least resemblance to each other; nor do I now, except that they are composed in verse of the same measure. After all, it is a melancholy observation, which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series of poetical lives, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed! So much can nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral. What vanity, what petulance in Pope! How painfully sensible of censure, and yet how restless in provocation! To what mean artifices could Addison stoop, in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend! Savage, how sordidly vicious, and the more condemned for the pains that are taken to palliate his vices. Offensive as they appear through a veil, how would they disgust without one. What a sycophant to the public taste was Dryden; sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings, though chaste in his conversation. I know not but one might search these eight volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he. . . .

Your mother wishes you to buy for her ten yards and a half of yard-wide Irish, from two shillings to two shillings and sixpence per yard; and my head will be equally obliged to you for a hat, of which I enclose a string that gives you the circumference. The depth of the crown must be four inches and one-eighth. Let it not be a round slouch, which I abhor, but a smart, well-cocked fashionable affair. A fashionable hat like-

wise for your mother; a black one if they are worn, otherwise chip.—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

March 29, 1784.

My dear Friend—It being his majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard side, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element, as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys halloo'd, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss[1] was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window, than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour, were filled. Mr. Grenville, advancing toward me, shook me by the

[1] His tame hare.

hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a riband from his button-hole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the county, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner perhaps was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepre-

sentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not I suppose have been bound to produce them. . . .

W. C.
M. U.

To the Rev. William Unwin

April 5, 1784.

My dear William—The hat which I desired you to procure for me, I now write to desire that you will not procure. Do not hastily infer that I mean to go about bareheaded : the whole of the matter is, that a readier method of supply has presented itself since I wrote.

I thanked you in my last for Johnson ; I now thank you, with more emphasis, for Beattie, the most agreeable and amiable writer I ever met with ; the only author I have seen whose critical and philosophical researches are diversified and embellished by a poetical imagination, that makes even the driest subject, and the leanest, a feast for an epicure in books. He is so much at his ease too, that his own character appears in every page, and which is very rare, we see not only the writer but the man : and that man so gentle, so well-tempered, so happy in his religion, and so humane in his philosophy, that it is necessary to love him, if one has the least sense of what is lovely. If you have not his poem called *The Minstrel*, and cannot borrow it, I must beg you to buy it for me ; for though I cannot afford to deal largely in so expensive a commodity as books, I must afford to purchase at least the poetical works of Beattie.

I have read six of Blair's Lectures, and what do I say of Blair ? That he is a sensible man, master of his subject, and excepting here and there a Scotticism, a good writer, so far at least as perspicuity of expression, and method, contribute to make one. But oh, the sterility of that man's fancy ! if indeed he has any such faculty belonging to him. Perhaps philosophers, or men designed for such, are sometimes born without

one; or perhaps it withers for want of exercise. However that may be, Doctor Blair has such a brain as Shakespeare somewhere describes as 'dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage.'

I take it for granted that these good men are philosophically correct (for they are both agreed upon the subject) in their account of the origin of language; and if the Scripture had left us in the dark upon that article, I should very readily adopt their hypothesis for want of better information. I should suppose, for instance, that man made his first effort in speech in the way of an interjection, and that ah, or oh, being uttered with wonderful gesticulation, and variety of attitude, must have left his powers of expression quite exhausted: that in a course of time he would invent names for many things, but first for the objects of his daily wants. An apple would consequently be called an apple, and perhaps not many years would elapse before the appellation would receive the sanction of general use. In this case, and upon this supposition, seeing one in the hand of another man, he would exclaim with a most moving pathos, 'Oh apple!'—Well and good—oh apple! is a very affecting speech, but in the meantime it profits him nothing. The man that holds it, eats it, and *he* goes away with 'oh apple' in his mouth, and with nothing better. Reflecting upon his disappointment, and that perhaps it arose from his not being more explicit, he contrives a term to denote his idea of transfer or gratuitous communication, and the next occasion that offers of a similar kind, performs his part accordingly. His speech now stands thus, 'Oh give apple!' The apple-holder perceives himself called upon to part with his fruit, and, having satisfied his own hunger, is perhaps not unwilling to do so. But unfortunately there is still room for a mistake, and a third person being present, he gives the apple to *him*. Again disappointed, and again perceiving that his language has not all the precision that is requisite, the orator retires to his study, and there, after much deep thinking, conceives that the insertion of a pronoun,

whose office shall be to signify that he not only wants the apple to be given, but given to himself, will remedy all defects, he uses it the next opportunity, and succeeds to a wonder, obtains the apple, and by his success such credit to his invention, that pronouns continue to be in great repute ever after.

Now as my two syllablemongers, Beattie and Blair, both agree that language was originally inspired, and that the great variety of languages we find upon earth at present took its rise from the confusion of tongues at Babel, I am not perfectly convinced that there is any just occasion to invent this very ingenious solution of a difficulty, which Scripture has solved already. My opinion however is, if I may presume to have an opinion of my own, so different from those who are so much wiser than myself, that if man had been his own teacher, and had acquired his words and his phrases only as necessity or convenience had prompted, his progress must have been considerably slower than it was, and in Homer's days the production of such a poem as the *Iliad* impossible. On the contrary, I doubt not that Adam on the very day of his creation was able to express himself in terms both forcible and elegant, and that he was at no loss for sublime diction, and logical combination, when he wanted to praise his Maker.—Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

April 26, 1784.

My dear Friend— . . . The candidates for this county have set an example of economy, which other candidates would do well to follow, having come to an agreement on both sides to defray the expenses of their voters, but to open no houses for the entertainment of the rabble; a reform however which the rabble did not at all approve of, and testified their dislike of it by a riot. A stage was built, from which the orators had designed to harangue the electors. This became the first victim of their fury. Having very little curiosity

to hear what gentlemen could say who would give them nothing better than words, they broke it in pieces, and threw the fragments upon the hustings. The sheriff, the members, the lawyers, the voters, were instantly put to flight. They rallied, but were again routed by a second assault, like the former. They then proceeded to break the windows of the inn to which they had fled; and a fear prevailing that at night they would fire the town, a proposal was made by the freeholders to face about and endeavour to secure them. At that instant a rioter, dressed in a merry-andrew's jacket, stepped forward, and challenged the best man among them. Olney sent the hero to the field, who made him repent of his presumption. Mr. Ashburner was he. Seizing him by the throat, he shook him,—he threw him to the earth, he made the hollowness of his skull resound by the application of his fists, and dragged him into custody without the least damage to his person. Animated by this example, the other freeholders followed it: and in five minutes twenty-eight out of thirty ragamuffins were safely lodged in gaol.

Adieu, my dear friend; writing makes my back ache, and my paper is full.—We love you, and are yours,

W. AND M.

To the Rev. William Unwin

May 3, 1784.

My dear Friend—The subject of face-painting may be considered (I think) in two points of view. First, there is room for dispute with respect to the consistency of the practice with good morals; and secondly, whether it be on the whole convenient or not, may be a matter worthy of agitation. I set out with all the formality of logical disquisition, but do not promise to observe the same regularity any further than it may comport with my purpose of writing as fast as I can.

As to the immorality of the custom, were I in France, I should see none. On the contrary, it seems in that country to be a symptom of modest conscious-

ness, and a tacit confession of what all know to be true, that French faces have in fact neither red nor white of their own. This humble acknowledgement of a defect looks the more like a virtue, being found among a people not remarkable for humility. Again, before we can prove the practice to be immoral, we must prove immorality in the design of those who use it; either that they intend a deception, or to kindle unlawful desires in the beholders. But the French ladies, so far as their purpose comes in question, must be acquitted of both these charges. Nobody supposes their colour to be natural for a moment, any more than he would if it were blue or green: and this unambiguous judgement of the matter is owing to two causes: first, to the universal knowledge we have, that French women are naturally either brown or yellow, with very few exceptions, and secondly, to the inartificial manner in which they paint: for they do not, as I am most satisfactorily informed, even attempt an imitation of nature, but besmear themselves hastily, and at a venture, anxious only to lay on enough. Where therefore there is no wanton intention, nor a wish to deceive, I can discover no immorality. But in England (I am afraid), our painted ladies are not clearly entitled to the same apology. They even imitate nature with such exactness, that the whole public is sometimes divided into parties, who litigate with great warmth the question, whether painted or not? this was remarkably the case with a Miss B——, whom I well remember. Her roses and lilies were never discovered to be spurious, till she attained an age that made the supposition of their being natural impossible. This anxiety to be not merely red and white, which is all they aim at in France, but to be thought very beautiful, and much more beautiful than nature has made them, is a symptom not very favourable to the idea we would wish to entertain of the chastity, purity, and modesty of our country-women. That they are guilty of a design to deceive, is certain. Otherwise why so much art? and if to deceive, wherefore and with

what purpose? Certainly either to gratify vanity of the silliest kind, or, which is still more criminal, to decoy and inveigle, and carry on more successfully the business of temptation. Here therefore my opinion splits itself into two opposite sides upon the same question. I can suppose a French woman, though painted an inch deep, to be a virtuous, discreet, excellent character; and in no instance should I think the worse of one because she was painted. But an English belle must pardon me, if I have not the same charity for her. She is at least an impostor, whether she cheats me or not, because she means to do so; and it is well if that be all the censure she deserves.

This brings me to my second class of ideas upon this topic: and here I feel that I should be fearfully puzzled, were I called upon to recommend the practice on the score of convenience. If a husband chose that his wife should paint, perhaps it might be her duty, as well as her interest, to comply. But I think he would not much consult his own, for reasons that will follow. In the first place, she would admire herself the more; and in the next, if she managed the matter well, she might be more admired by others; an acquisition that might bring her virtue under trials, to which otherwise it might never have been exposed. In no other case however can I imagine the practice in this country to be either expedient, or convenient. As a general one, it certainly is not expedient, because in general English women have no occasion for it. A swarthy complexion is a rarity here; and the sex, especially since inoculation has been so much in use, have very little cause to complain that nature has not been kind to them in the article of complexion. They may hide and spoil a good one; but they cannot (at least they hardly can), give themselves a better. But even if they could, there is yet a tragedy in the sequel, which should make them tremble. I understand that in France, though the use of rouge be general, the use of white paint is far from being so. In England, she that uses one,

commonly uses both. Now all white paints, or lotions, or whatever they may be called, are mercurial, consequently poisonous, consequently ruinous in time to the constitution. The Miss B—— above mentioned was a miserable witness of this truth, it being certain that her flesh fell from her bones before she died. Lady Coventry was hardly a less melancholy proof of it; and a London physician perhaps, were he at liberty to blab, could publish a bill of female mortality, of a length that would astonish us.

For these reasons, I utterly condemn the practice, as it obtains in England: and for a reason superior to all these, I must disapprove it. I cannot indeed discover that Scripture forbids it in so many words. But that anxious solicitude about the person, which such an artifice evidently betrays, is I am sure contrary to the tenor and spirit of it throughout. Show me a woman with a painted face, and I will show you a woman whose heart is set on things of the earth, and not on things above. But this observation of mine applies to it only when it is an imitative art. For in the use of French women, I think it as innocent as in the use of a wild Indian, who draws a circle round her face, and makes two spots, perhaps blue, perhaps white, in the middle of it. Such are my thoughts upon the matter. *Vive, valeque.*—Yours ever, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

July 3, 1784.

My dear William—I was sorry that I could only take a flying leave of you. When the coach stopped at the door, I thought you had been in your chamber; my deshabille would not otherwise have prevented my running down for the sake of a more suitable parting.

We rejoice that you had a safe journey, and though we should have rejoiced still more had you had no occasion for a physician, we are glad that, having had need of one, you had the good fortune to find him.

Let us hear soon that his advice has proved effectual, and that you are delivered from all ill symptoms.

Thanks for the care you have taken to furnish me with a dictionary. It is rather strange that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one; and stranger still that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author in the world, I should think it worth while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have a thought that when my present labours of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan and the Sabine bard; and perhaps by a re-perusal of some others, whose works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to read them, when, the judgement and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked.

This change of wind and weather comforts me, and I should have enjoyed the first fine morning I have seen this month with a peculiar relish, if our new tax-maker had not put me out of temper. I am angry with him, not only for the matter, but for the manner of his proposal. When he lays his impost upon horses, he is even jocular, and laughs; though considering that wheels, and miles, and grooms were taxed before, a graver countenance upon the occasion would have been more decent. But he provokes me still more by reasoning as he does on the justification of the tax upon candles. Some families, he says, will suffer little by it;—Why? Because they are so poor, that they cannot afford themselves more than ten pounds in the year. Excellent! They can use but few, therefore they will pay but little, and consequently will be but little burthened, an argument which for its cruelty and effrontery seems worthy of a hero; but he does not avail himself of the whole force of it, nor with all his wisdom had sagacity enough to see that it contains, when pushed to its utmost extent, a free discharge and acquittal of the poor from the payment of any tax at all; a commodity, being once made too expensive for

their pockets, will cost them nothing, for they will not buy it. Rejoice, therefore, O ye penniless! the minister will indeed send you to bed in the dark, but your remaining halfpenny will be safe; instead of being spent in the useless luxury of candlelight, it will buy you a roll for breakfast, which you will eat no doubt with gratitude to the man who so kindly lessens the number of your disbursements, and while he seems to threaten your money, saves it. I wish he would remember, that the halfpenny, which government imposes, the shopkeepers will swell to twopence. I wish he would visit the miserable huts of our lace-makers at Olney, and see them working in the winter months, by the light of a farthing candle, from four in the afternoon till midnight. I wish he had laid his tax upon the ten thousand lamps that illuminate the Pantheon, upon the flambeaux that wait upon ten thousand chariots and sedans in an evening, and upon the wax candles that give light to ten thousand card-tables. I wish, in short, that he would consider the pockets of the poor as sacred, and that to tax a people already so necessitous, is but to discourage the little industry that is left among us, by driving the laborious to despair.

A neighbour of mine, in Silver-end, keeps an ass; the ass lives on the other side of the garden wall, and I am writing in the green-house: it happens that he is this morning most musically disposed, either cheered by the fine weather, or by some new tune which he has just acquired, or by finding his voice more harmonious than usual. It would be cruel to mortify so fine a singer, therefore I do not tell him that he interrupts and hinders me; but I venture to tell you so, and to plead his performance in excuse of my abrupt conclusion.

I send you the goldfinches, with which you will do as you see good. We have an affectionate remembrance of your late visit, and of all our friends at Stock.—Believe me ever yours, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

July 5, 1784.

My dear Friend—A dearth of materials, a consciousness that my subjects are for the most part and must be uninteresting and unimportant, but above all, a poverty of animal spirits, that makes writing much a great fatigue to me, have occasioned my choice of smaller paper. Acquiesce in the justness of these reasons for the present; and if ever the times should mend with me, I sincerely promise to amend with them.

Homer says on a certain occasion, that Jupiter, when he was wanted at home, was gone to partake of an entertainment provided for him by the Aethiopians. If by Jupiter we understand the weather, or the season, as the ancients frequently did, we may say, that our English Jupiter has been absent on account of some such invitation; during the whole month of June he left us to experience almost the rigours of winter. This fine day, however, affords us some hope that the feast is ended, and that we shall enjoy his company without the interference of his Aethiopian friends again.

Is it possible that the wise men of antiquity could entertain a real reverence for the fabulous rubbish, which they dignified with the name of religion? We, who have been favoured from our infancy with so clear a light, are perhaps hardly competent to decide the question, and may strive in vain to imagine the absurdities that even a good understanding may receive as truths, when totally unaided by revelation. It seems, however, that men, whose conceptions upon other subjects were often sublime, whose reasoning powers were undoubtedly equal to your own, and whose management in matters of jurisprudence that required a very industrious examination of evidence, was as acute and subtle as that of a modern Attorney-General, could not be the dupes of such imposture as a child

among us would detect and laugh at. Juvenal, I remember, introduces one of his Satires with an observation, that there were some in his day who had the hardiness to laugh at the stories of Tartarus, and Styx, and Charon, and of the frogs that croak upon the banks of Lethe, giving his reader at the same time cause to suspect that he was himself one of that profane number. Horace, on the other hand, declares in sober sadness that he would not for all the world get into a boat with a man who had divulged the Eleusinian mysteries. Yet we know that those mysteries, whatever they might be, were altogether as unworthy to be esteemed divine as the mythology of the vulgar. How then must we determine? If Horace were a good and orthodox heathen, how came Juvenal to be such an ungracious libertine in principle, as to ridicule the doctrines which the other held as sacred? Their opportunities of information, and their mental advantages, were equal. I feel myself rather inclined to believe, that Juvenal's avowed infidelity was sincere, and that Horace was no better than a canting hypocritical professor. . . .—Yours affectionately, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

July 28, 1784.

My dear Friend—I may perhaps be short, but am not willing that you should go to Lymington without first having had a line from me. I know that place well, having spent six weeks there above twenty years ago. The town is neat, and the country delightful. You walk well, and will consequently find a part of the coast, called Hall-Cliff, within the reach of your ten toes. It was a favourite walk of mine: to the best of my remembrance, about three miles distance from Lymington. There you may stand upon the beach, and contemplate the Needle-rock; at least you might have done so twenty years ago. But since that time I think it is fallen from its base, and is drowned, and

is no longer a visible object of contemplation. I wish you may pass your time there happily, as in all probability you will; perhaps usefully too to others, undoubtedly so to yourself. . . .

W. C. AND M. U.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Aug. 14, 1784.

My dear Friend— . . . Your mother and I continue to visit Weston daily, and find in those agreeable bowers such amusement as leaves us but little room to regret that we can go no farther. Having touched that theme, I cannot abstain from the pleasure of telling you that our neighbours in that place, being about to leave it for some time, and meeting us there but a few evenings before their departure, entreated us during their absence to consider the garden, and all its contents, as our own, and to gather whatever we liked, without the least scruple. We accordingly picked strawberries as often as we went, and brought home as many bundles of honeysuckles as served to perfume our dwelling till they returned. I hear that Mr. Throckmorton is making another balloon, a paper one, containing sixteen quires. It is to fly upon the wings of ignited spirits, and will therefore, I suppose, be sent up at night. I take it for granted that we shall be invited to the spectacle; but whether we shall have the courage to expose ourselves to the inconveniences of a nocturnal visit, is at present doubtful. . . .

If you know anybody that is writing, or intends to write, an epic poem on the new regulation of *franks*, you may give him my compliments, and these two lines for a beginning—

> Heu quot amatores nunc turquet epistola rara!
> Vectigal certum, peritoraque gratia FRANKI!

Yours faithfully, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

August 16, 1784.

My dear Friend—Had you not expressed a desire to hear from me before you take leave of Lymington, I certainly should not have answered you so soon. Knowing the place, and the amusement it affords, I should have had more modesty than to suppose myself capable of adding anything to your present entertainments worthy to rank with them. I am not however totally destitute of such pleasures as an inland country may pretend to. If my windows do not command a view of the ocean, at least they look out upon a profusion of mignonette, which, if it be not so grand an object, is however quite as fragrant: and if I have not a hermit in a grotto, I have nevertheless myself in a greenhouse,—a less venerable figure perhaps, but not at all less animated than he: nor are we in this nook altogether unfurnished with such means of philosophical experiment and speculation as at present the world rings with. On Thursday morning last, we sent up a balloon from Emberton meadow. Thrice it rose, and as often descended; and in the evening it performed another flight at Newport, where it went up, and came down no more. Like the arrow discharged at the pigeon in the Trojan games, it kindled in the air, and was consumed in a moment. I have not heard what interpretation the soothsayers have given to the omen, but shall wonder a little if the Newton shepherd prognosticate anything less from it than the bloodiest war that was ever waged in Europe.

I am reading Cook's last voyage, and am much pleased and amused with it. It seems that in some of the Friendly Isles, they excel so much in dancing, and perform that operation with such exquisite delicacy and grace, that they are not surpassed even upon our European stages. O! that Vestris had been in the ship, that he might have seen himself outdone by a savage. The paper indeed tells us that the queen of

France has clapped this king of capers up in prison, for declining to dance before her, on a pretence of sickness, when in fact he was in perfect health. If this be true, perhaps he may by this time be prepared to second such a wish as mine, and to think that the durance he suffers would be well exchanged for a dance at Anamooka. I should however as little have expected to hear that these islanders had such consummate skill in an art, that requires so much taste in the conduct of the person, as that they were good mathematicians and astronomers. Defective as they are in every branch of knowledge, and in every other species of refinement, it seems wonderful that they should arrive at such perfection in the dance, which some of our English gentlemen, with all the assistance of French instruction, find it impossible to learn. We must conclude therefore that particular nations have a genius for particular feats; and that our neighbours in France, and our friends in the South Sea, have minds very nearly akin, though they inhabit countries so very remote from each other. . .—Your affectionate Friend,

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Sept. 18, 1784.

My dear Friend—Following your good example, I lay before me a sheet of my largest paper. It was this moment fair and unblemished, but I have begun to blot it, and having begun, am not likely to cease till I have spoiled it. I have sent you many a sheet that in my judgement of it has been very unworthy of your acceptance, but my conscience was in some measure satisfied by reflecting, that if it were good for nothing, at the same time it cost you nothing, except the trouble of reading it. But the case is altered now. You must pay a solid price for frothy matter, and though I do not absolutely pick your pocket, yet you lose your money, and, as the saying is, are never the wiser; a saying literally fulfilled to the reader of my epistles.

My greenhouse is never so pleasant as when we are just upon the point of being turned out of it. The gentleness of the autumnal suns, and the calmness of this latter season, make it a much more agreeable retreat than we ever find it in summer; when, the winds being generally brisk, we cannot cool it by admitting a sufficient quantity of air, without being at the same time incommoded by it. But now I sit with all the windows and the door wide open, and am regaled with the scent of every flower in a garden as full of flowers as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees, but if I lived in a hive I should hardly hear more of their music. All the bees in the neighbourhood resort to a bed of mignonette, opposite to the window, and pay me for the honey they get out of it by a hum, which, though rather monotonous, is as agreeable to my ear as the whistling of my linnets. All the sounds that nature utters are delightful,—at least in this country. I should not perhaps find the roaring of lions in Africa, or of bears in Russia, very pleasing; but I know no beast in England whose voice I do not account musical, save and except always the braying of an ass. The notes of all our birds and fowls please me, without one exception. I should not indeed think of keeping a goose in a cage, that I might hang him up in the parlour for the sake of his melody, but a goose upon a common, or in a farm-yard, is no bad performer; and as to insects, if the black beetle, and beetles indeed of all hues, will keep out of my way, I have no objection to any of the rest; on the contrary, in whatever key they sing, from the gnat's fine treble to the bass of the humble-bee, I admire them all. Seriously, however, it strikes me as a very observable instance of providential kindness to man, that such an exact accord has been contrived between his ear, and the sounds with which, at least in a rural situation, it is almost every moment visited. All the world is sensible of the uncomfortable effect that certain sounds have upon the nerves, and consequently upon the spirits:—and if a sinful world had been filled with such as would have

curdled the blood, and have made the sense of hearing a perpetual inconvenience, I do not know that we should have had a right to complain. But now the fields, the woods, the gardens, have each their concert, and the ear of man is for ever regaled by creatures who seem only to please themselves. Even the ears that are deaf to the Gospel, are continually entertained, though without knowing it, by sounds for which they are solely indebted to its author. There is somewhere in infinite space a world that does not roll within the precincts of mercy, and as it is reasonable, and even scriptural, to suppose that there is music in Heaven, in those dismal regions perhaps the reverse of it is found; tones so dismal, as to make woe itself more insupportable, and to acuminate even despair. But my paper admonishes me in good time to draw the reins, and to check the descent of my fancy into deeps, with which she is but too familiar.—Our best love attends you both, with yours, *Sum ut semper, tui studiosissimus,*

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Oct. 2, 1784.

My dear William— . . . Mr. —— is a Cornish member; but for what place in Cornwall I know not. All I know of him is, that I saw him once clap his two hands upon a rail, meaning to leap over it;—but he did not think the attempt a safe one, and therefore took them off again. He was in company with Mr. Throckmorton. With that gentleman we drank chocolate, since I wrote last. The occasion of our visit was, as usual, a balloon. Your mother invited her, and I him, and they promised to return the visit, but have not yet performed. *Tout le monde se trouvait là*; as you may suppose, among the rest, Mrs. W——. She was driven to the door by her son, a boy of seventeen, in a phaeton, drawn by four horses from Lilliput. This is an ambiguous expression, and should what I write now be legible a thousand years hence, might puzzle

commentators. Be it known therefore to the Alduses and the Stevenses of ages yet to come, that I do not mean to affirm that Mrs. W—— herself came from Lilliput that morning, or indeed that she was ever there, but merely to describe the horses, as being so diminutive, that they might be, with propriety, said to be Lilliputian.

The privilege of franking having been so cropped, I know not in what manner I and my bookseller are to settle the conveyance of proof sheets hither, and back again. They must travel I imagine by coach, a large quantity of them at a time; for, like other authors, I find myself under a poetical necessity of being frugal.

We love you all, jointly and separately, as usual.

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Oct. 10, 1784.

My dear William—I send you four quires of verse,[1] which having sent, I shall dismiss from my thoughts, and think no more of, till I see them in print. I have not after all found time or industry enough to give the last hand to the points. I believe, however, they are not very erroneous, though in so long a work, and in a work that requires nicety in this particular, some inaccuracies will escape. Where you find any, you will oblige me by correcting them.

In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical. Writing on such subjects I could not be otherwise. I can write nothing without aiming at least at usefulness: it were beneath my years to do it, and still more dishonourable to my religion. I know that a reformation of such abuses as I have censured is not to be expected from the efforts of a poet; but to contemplate the world, its follies, its vices, its indifference to duty, and its strenuous attachment to what is evil, and not to reprehend were to approve it. From this charge at least I shall be clear,

[1] *The Task.*

for I have neither tacitly nor expressly flattered either its characters or its customs. I have paid one, and only one compliment, which was so justly due, that I did not know how to withhold it, especially having so fair an occasion;—I forget myself, there is another in the first book to Mr. Throckmorton,—but the compliment I mean is to Mr. Smith. It is however so managed, that nobody but himself can make the application, and you, to whom I disclose the secret; a delicacy on my part, which so much delicacy on his obliged me to the observance of.

What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance, —and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lope de Vega, or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience.

My descriptions are all from nature: not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience: not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I have varied as much as I could (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string), I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed.

If the work cannot boast a regular plan (in which respect however I do not think it altogether indefensible), it may yet boast, that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency; to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure, as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue.

If it pleases you I shall be happy, and collect from your pleasure in it an omen of its general acceptance. —Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Oct. 20, 1784.

My dear William— . . . I have not been without thoughts of adding *John Gilpin* at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world, and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation. . . .

My sentiments on the subject of Charles's decollation are peculiar; at least I believe they are so. I think it was a good deed, but ill done; that his life was forfeited, but taken away upon wrong motives. But my notions being peculiar are for that reason better suppressed, and I am indebted to you for the hint. Be pleased therefore to alter for me thus, with the difference of only one word from the alteration proposed by you,—

> We too are friends to royalty. We love
> The king who loves the law, respects his bounds,
> And reigns content within them.

You observed probably, in your second reading, that I allow the life of an animal to be fairly taken away, when it interferes either with the interest or convenience of man. Consequently snails, and all reptiles that spoil our crops, either of fruit, or grain, may be destroyed, if we can catch them. It gives me real pleasure, that Mrs. Unwin so readily understood me. Blank verse, by the unusual arrangement of the words, and by the frequent infusion of one line into another, not less than by the style, which requires a kind of tragical magnificence, cannot be chargeable with much

obscurity,—must rather be singularly perspicuous,—to be so easily comprehended. It is my labour, and my principal one, to be as clear as possible. You do not mistake me, when you suppose that I have great respect for the virtue that flies temptation. It is that sort of prowess which the whole strain of Scripture calls upon us to manifest, when assailed by sensual evil. Interior mischiefs must be grappled with. There is no flight from them. But solicitations to sin, that address themselves to our bodily senses, are, I believe, seldom conquered in any other way. . . .

We have to trouble you yet once again in the marketing way. I want a yard of green satin, to front a winter under-waistcoat, and your mother a pound of prepared hartshorn. Being tolerably honest folks, it is probable that we shall some time or other pay you all our debts. . . . —Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Oct. 30, 1784.

My dear Friend—I accede most readily to the justness of your remark on the subject of the truly Roman heroism of the Sandwich islanders. Proofs of such prowess I believe are seldom exhibited by a people who have attained to a high degree of civilization. Refinement and profligacy of principle are too nearly allied, to admit of anything so noble; and I question whether any instances of faithful friendship, like that which so much affected you in the behaviour of the poor savage, were produced even by the Romans themselves, in the latter days of the empire. They *had* been a nation whose virtues it is impossible not to wonder at. But Greece, which was to them what France is to us, a Pandora's box of mischief, reduced them to her own standard, and they naturally soon sunk still lower. Religion in this case seems pretty much out of the question. To the production of such heroism, undebauched nature herself is equal. When Italy was a land of heroes, she knew no more of the true God than

her cicisbeos and her fiddlers know now; and indeed it seems a matter of indifference, whether a man be born under a truth which does not influence him, or under the actual influence of a lie; or if there be any difference between the two cases, it seems to be rather in favour of the latter; for a false persuasion (such as the Mahometan for instance) may animate the courage, and furnish motives for the contempt of death, while despisers of the true religion are punished for their folly by being abandoned to the last degrees of depravity. Accordingly we see a Sandwich islander sacrificing himself to his dead friend, and our Christian seamen and mariners, instead of being impressed by a sense of his generosity, butchering him with a persevering cruelty that will disgrace them for ever; for he was a defenceless, unresisting enemy, who meant nothing more than to gratify his love for the deceased. To slay him in such circumstances was to murder him, and with every aggravation of the crime that can be imagined.

I am now reading a book which you have never read, and will probably never read—Knox's *Essays*. Perhaps I should premise, that I am driven to such reading by the want of books that would please me better, neither having any, nor the means of procuring any. I am not sorry, however, that I have met with him; though when I have allowed him the praise of being a sensible man, and in *his* way a good one, I have allowed him all that I can afford. Neither his style pleases me, which is sometimes insufferably dry and hard, and sometimes ornamented even to an Harveian tawdriness; nor his manner, which is never lively without being the worse for it; so unhappy is he in his attempts at character and narration. But writing chiefly on the manners, vices, and follies of the modern day, to me he is at least so far useful, as that he gives me information upon points concerning which I neither *can* nor *would* be informed except by hearsay. Of such information, however, I have need, being a writer upon those subjects myself, and a satirical

writer too. It is fit, therefore, in order that I may find fault in the right place, that I should know where fault may properly be found.

I am again at Johnson's in the shape of a poem in blank verse, consisting of six books, and called *The Task*. I began it about this time twelvemonth, and writing sometimes an hour in a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours, have lately finished it. I mentioned it not sooner, because almost to the last I was doubtful whether I should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as, while it spurred me to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify me for it. My bookseller I suppose will be as tardy as before. I do not expect to be born into the world till the month of March, when I and the crocuses shall peep together. You may assure yourself that I shall take my first opportunity to wait on you. I mean likewise to gratify myself by obtruding my Muse upon Mr. Bacon.

Adieu, my dear friend! we are well, and love you. —Yours, and Mrs. Newton's, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 1, 1784.

My dear Friend— . . . I am not sorry that *John Gilpin*, though hitherto he has been nobody's child, is likely to be owned at last. Here and there I can give him a touch that I think will mend him, the language in some places not being quite so quaint and old-fashioned as it should be; and in one of the stanzas there is a false rhyme. When I have thus given the finishing stroke to his figure, I mean to grace him with two mottoes, a Greek and a Latin one, which, when the world shall see that I have only a little one of three words to the volume itself, and none to the books of which it consists, they will perhaps understand as a stricture upon that pompous display of literature, with which some authors take occasion to crowd their titles.

Knox, in particular, who is a sensible man too, has not, I think, fewer than half a dozen to his *Essays*.—Adieu, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Nov. 1784.

My dear Friend—To condole with you on the death of a mother aged eighty-seven would be absurd; rather, therefore, as is reasonable, I congratulate you on the almost singular felicity of having enjoyed the company of so amiable, and so near a relation so long. Your lot and mine in this respect have been very different, as indeed in almost every other. Your mother lived to see you rise, at least to see you comfortably established in the world: mine, dying when I was six years old, did not live to see me sink in it. You may remember with pleasure, while you live, a blessing vouchsafed to you so long; and I, while I live, must regret a comfort of which I was deprived so early. I can truly say, that not a week passes (perhaps I might with equal veracity say a day), in which I do not think of her. Such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short. But the ways of God are equal;—and when I reflect on the pangs she would have suffered, had she been a witness of all mine, I see more cause to rejoice than to mourn, that she was hidden in the grave so soon.

We have, as you say, lost a lively and sensible neighbour in Lady Austen, but we have been long accustomed to a state of retirement within one degree of solitude, and being naturally lovers of still life, can relapse into our former duality without being unhappy at the change. To me indeed a third is not necessary, while I can have the companion I have had these twenty years.

I am gone to the press again; a volume of mine will greet your hands some time either in the course of the winter or early in the spring. You will find it perhaps on the whole more entertaining than the

former, as it treats a greater variety of subjects, and those, at least the most, of a sublunary kind. It will consist of a poem, in six books, called *The Task*. To which will be added another, which I finished yesterday, called, I believe, *Tirocinium*, on the subject of education.

You perceive that I have taken your advice, and given the pen no rest. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Nov. 20, 1784.

My dear William—The *Tirocinium* kisses your hands. I changed my mind about mottoes to *John Gilpin*. I feared that the world might not understand me; and then, instead of thinking me witty, they might have called me foolish. *Tiro*, too, in consideration of the subject, actually required a learned embellishment of that sort. You will observe that mine is learned indeed. My neighbour, Mr. Bull, furnished me with it, for I have no such writers as are pressed into my service for this purpose in all my library; I had worn out Horace and Virgil before. *N.B.*—He never saw a line of the poem.

I do not think that drinkers, gamesters, fornicators, lewd talkers, and profane jesters,—men, in short, of no principles either religious or moral (and such we know are the majority of those sent out by our Universities),—*can* be dishonoured by a comparison with anything on this side Erebus. I do not, therefore, repent of my frogs.

When I first knew Cambridge, I know that Benet had a character: it was my father's principal inducement when he chose that college for my brother; a slight alteration therefore may be sufficient, and by substituting *was* for *is* the matter may be accommodated. As thus,

> He graced a college in which order yet
> *Was* sacred.

And indeed it stands so in the foul copy.

The following short drama will, I think, set the musical business in so clear a light that you will no longer doubt the propriety of the censure.

Scene opens, and discovers the Abbey filled with Hearers and Performers. An ANGEL *descends into the midst of them.*

Angel. What are you about?
Answer. Commemorating Handel.
Angel. What is commemoration?
Answer. A ceremony instituted in honour of him whom we commemorate.
Angel. But you sing anthems?
Answer. Yes, because he composed them.
Angel. And Italian airs?
Answer. Yes, and for the same reason.
Angel. So then because Handel set anthems to music, you sing them in honour of Handel; and because he composed the music of Italian songs, you sing them in a church. Truly Handel is much obliged to you, but God is greatly dishonoured.

[*Exit* ANGEL, *and the music proceeds without further impediment.*

—Yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

1784.

My dear William— . . . The critics will never know that four lines of it[1] were composed while I had an ounce and a half of ipecacuanha upon my stomach, and a wooden vessel called a pail between my knees; and that in the very article,—in short, that I was delivered of the emetic and the verses in the same moment. Knew they this, they would at least allow me to be a poet of singular industry, and confess that I lose no time. I have heard of poets, who have found cathartics of sovereign use, when they had occasion to be particularly brilliant. Dryden always used them, and in commemoration of it, Bayes in the *Rehearsal* is made to inform the audience, that in a poetical emergency he always had recourse to stewed prunes. But I am the only poet who has dared to reverse the prescription, and whose enterprise, having succeeded to admiration, warrants him to recommend an emetic to all future bards, as the most infallible means of pro-

[1] *Tirocinium.*

ducing a fluent and easy versification. . . .—My love to all your family. Adieu! W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Dec. 4, 1784.

My dear Friend—You have my hearty thanks for a very good barrel of oysters; which necessary acknowledgement once made, I might perhaps show more kindness by cutting short an epistle, than by continuing one, in which you are not likely to find your account, either in the way of information or amusement. The season of the year, indeed, is not very friendly to such communications. A damp atmosphere and a sunless sky will have their effect upon the spirits; and when the spirits are checked, farewell to all hope of being good company, either by letter or otherwise. I envy those happy voyagers, who, with so much ease, ascend to regions unsullied with a cloud, and date their epistles from an extra-mundane situation. No wonder if they outshine us who poke about in the dark below, in the vivacity of their sallies, as much as they soar above us in their excursions. Not but that I should be very sorry to go to the clouds for wit: on the contrary, I am satisfied that I discover more by continuing where I am. Every man to his business. Their vocation is, to see fine prospects, and to make pithy observations upon the world below; such as these, for instance: that the earth, beheld from a height that one trembles to think of, has the appearance of a circular plain; that England is a very rich and cultivated country, in which every man's property is ascertained by the hedges that intersect the lands; and that London and Westminster, seen from the neighbourhood of the moon, make but an insignificant figure. I admit the utility of these remarks; but in the meantime, as I say, *chacun à son goût*; and mine is rather to creep than fly; and to carry with me, if possible, an unbroken neck to the grave.—I remain, as ever, your affectionate Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. John Newton

Dec. 11, 1784.

My dear Friend—Having imitated no man, I may reasonably hope that I shall not incur the disadvantage of a comparison with my betters. Milton's manner was peculiar. So is Thomson's. He that should write like either of them, would, in my judgement, deserve the name of a copyist, but not of a poet. A judicious and sensible reader therefore, like yourself, will not say that my manner is not good, because it does not resemble theirs, but will rather consider what it is in itself. Blank verse is susceptible of a much greater diversification of manner, than verse in rhyme: and why the modern writers of it have all thought proper to cast their numbers alike, I know not. Certainly it was not necessity that compelled them to it. I flatter myself however that I have avoided that sameness with others, which would entitle me to nothing but a share in one common oblivion with them all. It is possible that, as the reviewer of my former volume found cause to say that he knew not to what class of writers to refer me, the reviewer of this, whosoever he shall be, may see occasion to remark the same singularity. At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond, than to overrate my own productions, I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit anything by this volume that I gained by the last.

As to the title, I take it to be the best that is to be had. It is not possible that a book, including such a variety of subjects, and in which no particular one is predominant, should find a title adapted to them all. In such a case, it seemed almost necessary to accommodate the name to the incident that gave birth to the poem; nor does it appear to me, that because I performed more than my task, therefore *The Task* is not a suitable title. A house would still be a house, though the builder of it should make it ten times as big as he

at first intended. I might indeed, following the example of the Sunday newsmonger, call it 'The Olio.' But I should do myself wrong; for though it have much variety, it has, I trust, no confusion.

For the same reason none of the interior titles apply themselves to the contents at large of that book to which they belong. They are, every one of them, taken either from the leading (I should say the introductory), passage of that particular book, or from that which makes the most conspicuous figure in it. Had I set off with a design to write upon a gridiron, and had I actually written near two hundred lines upon that utensil, as I have upon the Sofa, *The Gridiron* should have been my title. But the Sofa being, as I may say, the starting-post from which I addressed myself to the long race that I soon conceived a design to run, it acquired a just pre-eminence in my account, and was very worthily advanced to the titular honour it enjoys, its right being at least so far a good one, that no word in the language could pretend a better.

The Timepiece appears to me (though by some accident the import of that title has escaped you), to have a degree of propriety beyond the most of them. The book to which it belongs is intended to strike the hour that gives notice of approaching judgement, and dealing pretty largely in the *signs* of the *times*, seems to be denominated, as it is, with a sufficient degree of accommodation to the subject. . . .—Your affectionate

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Jan. 5, 1785.

. . . I have observed, and you must have had occasion to observe it oftener than I, that when a man, who once seemed to be a Christian, has put off that character, and resumed his old one, he loses, together with the grace which he seemed to possess, the most amiable part of the character that he resumes. The best features of his natural face seem to be struck out, that,

after having worn religion only as a handsome mask, he may make a more disgusting appearance than he did before he assumed it.

According to your request, I subjoin my Epitaph on Dr. Johnson; at least I mean to do it, if a drum, which at this moment announces the arrival of a giant in the town, will give me leave. I have not yet sent the copy to the Magazine.

EPITAPH ON DR. JOHNSON

Here Johnson lies—a sage, by all allow'd,
Whom to have bred may well make England proud;
Whose prose was eloquence by wisdom taught,
The graceful vehicle of virtuous thought;
Whose verse may claim, grave, masculine, and strong,
Superior praise to the mere poet's song;
Who many a noble gift from Heaven possessed
And faith at last—alone worth all the rest.
Oh man immortal, by a double prize,
On earth by fame, by favour in the skies.

Mr. Page has quitted the country, having neither left admirers behind him, nor taken any with him; unless perhaps his wife be one, which admits some doubt. He quarrelled with most of his acquaintance, and the rest grew sick of him. Even his friend Maurice Smith was of this number. He even quarrelled with his auctioneer in the midst of the sale of his goods, and would not permit him to proceed, finishing that matter himself. He took leave of his audience in these words: 'And now let us pray for your wicked Vicar.'—Yours, Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Olney, Jan. 15, 1785.

My dear William—Your letters are always welcome. You can always either find something to say, or can amuse me and yourself with a sociable and friendly way of saying nothing. I never found that a letter was the more easily written, because the writing of it had been long delayed. On the contrary, experience has taught me to answer soon, that I may do it without difficulty. It is in vain to wait for an accumulation of materials

in a situation such as yours and mine, productive of few events. At the end of our expectations we shall find ourselves as poor as at the beginning.

I can hardly tell you with any certainty of information upon what terms Mr. Newton and I may be supposed to stand at present. A month, I believe, has passed since I heard from him. But my *friseur* having been in London in the course of this week, whence he returned last night, and having called at Hoxton, brought me his love, and an excuse for his silence, which (he said) had been occasioned by the frequency of his preachings at this season. He was not pleased that my manuscript was not first transmitted to him, and I have cause to suspect that he was even mortified at being informed that a certain inscribed poem was not inscribed to himself. But we shall jumble together again, as people that have an affection for each other at bottom, notwithstanding now and then a slight disagreement, always do. . . .

I have been crossing the channel in a balloon, ever since I read of that achievement by Blanchard. I have an insatiable thirst to know the philosophical reason, why his vehicle had like to have fallen into the sea, when, for aught that appears, the gas was not at all exhausted. Did not the extreme cold condense the inflammable air, and cause the globe to collapse? Tell me, and be my Apollo for ever!—Affectionately yours,

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Feb. 7, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . I communicate the following anecdote at your mother's instance, who will suffer no part of my praise to be sunk in oblivion. A certain Lord Archibald Hamilton has hired the house of Mr. Small at Clifton, in our neighbourhood, for a hunting seat. There he lives at present with his wife and daughter. They are an exemplary family in some respects, and I believe an amiable one in all. The Rev. Mr. Jones, the curate of that parish, who often

dines with them by invitation on a Sunday, recommended my volume to their reading; and his lordship, after having perused a part of it, expressed to the said Mr. Jones an ardent desire to be acquainted with the author, from motives which my great modesty will not suffer me to particularize. Mr. Jones, however, like a wise man, informed his lordship, that for certain special reasons and causes I had declined going into company for many years, and that therefore he must not hope for my acquaintance. His lordship most civilly subjoined that he was very sorry for it.

'And is that all?' say you. Now, were I to hear you say so, I should look foolish and say—'Yes.'—But having you at a distance, I snap my fingers at you, and say—'No, that is not all.'—Mr. Teedon, who favours us now and then with his company in an evening, as usual, was not long since discoursing with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself, on the many providential interpositions that had taken place in his favour. 'He had wished for many things (he said), which, at the time when he formed those wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, one was, that he might be connected with men of genius and ability;—and in my connexion with this worthy gentleman (said he, turning to me), that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified.' You may suppose that I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead, when I heard this speech; and if you do, you will not be at all mistaken. So much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense.

Thus far I proceeded easily enough; and here I laid down my pen, and spent some minutes in recollection, endeavouring to find some subject with which I might fill the little blank that remains. But none presents itself. Farewell therefore, and remember those who are mindful of you!

Present our love to all your comfortable fireside, and believe me ever most affectionately yours,

W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Olney, Feb. 19, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . Mr. Teedon has just left us. He came to exhibit to us a specimen of his kinsman's skill in the art of bookbinding. The book on which he had exercised his ingenuity was your *Life*. You did not, indeed, make a very splendid appearance; but, considering that you were dressed by an untaught artificer, and that it was his first attempt, you had no cause to be dissatisfied. The young man has evidently the possession of talents, by which he might shine both for the benefit of others and for his own, did not his situation smother him. He can make a dulcimer, tune it, play upon it, and with common advantages would undoubtedly have been able to make an harpsichord. But, unfortunately, he lives where neither the one nor the other are at all in vogue. He can convert the shell of a cocoa-nut into a decent drinking-cup; but when he has done, he must either fill it at the pump, or use it merely as an ornament of his own mantle-tree. In like manner, he can bind a book; but if he would have books to bind, he must either make them or buy them, for we have few or no literati at Olney. Some men have talents with which they do mischief; and others have talents with which, if they do no mischief to others, at least they can do but little good to themselves. They are, however, always a blessing, unless by our own folly we make them a curse; for if we cannot turn them to a lucrative account, they may however furnish us, at many a dull season, with the means of innocent amusement. Such is the use that Mr. Killingworth makes of his; and this evening we have, I think, made him happy, having furnished him with two octavo volumes, in which the principles and practice of all ingenious arts are inculcated and explained. I make little doubt that, by the half of it, he will in time be able to perform many feats for which he will never be one farthing the richer, but by

which, nevertheless, himself and his kin will be much diverted.

How much better is he employed than a neighbour of ours has been for many years, whose sole occupation, although he too is naturally ingenious, has centred in filling his glass and emptying it. He is neither unknown nor much known to you, but you remember him by the name of Geary Ball. He is now languishing in a dropsy, and, in the prime of life, labouring under all the infirmities of age. He solaces himself, I am told, with the recollection of somewhat that passed in his experience many years ago, which, although it has been followed by no better fruits than will grow at an alehouse, he dignifies with the name of Conversion. Sows are so converted when they are washed, and give the same evidence of an unchanged nature by returning to the mire. Mr. Perry, whose daughter he married, often visits him, but declares that of all the insensibles he ever saw, poor Geary is the most completely stupid. So long as he was able to crawl into the street, his journey was to the Royal Oak and home again; and so punctual were we both, I in cleaning my teeth at my window, and he in drinking his dram at the same time, that I seldom failed to observe him. But both his legs are now blistered, and refuse to assist him in poisoning himself any longer. . . . .

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 19, 1785.

My dear Friend—You will wonder, no doubt, when I tell you that I write upon a card-table; and will be still more surprised when I add, that we breakfast, dine, sup, upon a card-table. In short, it serves all purposes, except the only one for which it was originally designed. The solution of this mystery shall follow, lest it should run in your head at a wrong time, and should puzzle you, perhaps, when you are on the point of ascending your pulpit: for I have

heard you say, that at such seasons your mind is often troubled with impertinent intrusions. The round table, which we formerly had in use, was unequal to the pressure of my superincumbent breast and elbows. When I wrote upon it, it creaked and tilted, and, by a variety of inconvenient tricks, disturbed the process. The fly-table was too slight and too small; the square dining-table, too heavy and too large, occupying, when its leaves were spread, almost the whole parlour; and the sideboard-table, having its station at too great a distance from the fire, and not being easily shifted out of its place and into it again, by reason of its size, was equally unfit for my purpose. The card-table, therefore, which had for sixteen years been banished as mere lumber; the card-table, which is covered with green baize, and is, therefore, preferable to any other that has a slippery surface; the card-table, that stands firm and never totters,—is advanced to the honour of assisting me upon my scribbling occasions; and, because we choose to avoid the trouble of making frequent changes in the position of our household furniture, proves equally serviceable upon all others. It has cost us now and then the downfall of a glass: for, when covered with a tablecloth, the fish-ponds are not easily discerned; and not being seen, are sometimes as little thought of. But having numerous good qualities which abundantly compensate that single inconvenience, we spill upon it our coffee, our wine, and our ale, without murmuring, and resolve that it shall be our table still, to the exclusion of all others. Not to be tedious, I will add but one more circumstance upon the subject, and that only because it will impress upon you, as much as anything that I have said, a sense of the value we set upon its escritorial capacity. Parched and penetrated on one side by the heat of the fire, it has opened into a large fissure, which pervades not the moulding of it only, but the very substance of the plank. At the mouth of this aperture, a sharp splinter presents itself, which, as sure as it comes in contact with a gown or an apron, tears it. It happens,

unfortunately, to be on that side of this excellent and never-to-be-forgotten table which Mrs. Unwin sweeps with her apparel, almost as often as she rises from her chair. The consequences need not, to use the fashionable phrase, be given in detail: but the needle sets all to rights; and the card-table still holds possession of its functions without a rival. . . .

One of our most favourite walks is spoiled. The Spinney is cut down to the stumps: even the lilacs and the syringas, to the stumps. Little did I think (though indeed I might have thought it), that the trees which screened me from the sun last summer would this winter be employed in roasting potatoes and boiling tea-kettles for the poor of Olney. But so it has proved; and we ourselves have, at this moment, more than two wagon loads of them in our wood-loft.

> Such various services can trees perform;
> Whom once they screen'd from heat, in time they warm. . . .

I am yours, my dear Friend, as usual,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. John Newton

April 22, 1785.

My dear Friend—When I received your account of the great celebrity of *John Gilpin*, I felt myself both flattered and grieved. Being man, and having in my composition all the ingredients of which other men are made, and vanity among the rest, it pleased me to reflect that I was on a sudden become so famous, and that all the world was busy inquiring after me: but the next moment, recollecting my former self, and that thirteen years ago, as harmless as John's history is, I should not then have written it, my spirits sank, and I was ashamed of my success. Your letter was followed the next post by one from Mr. Unwin. You tell me that I am rivalled by Mrs. Bellamy; and he, that I have a competitor for fame, not less formidable,

in the Learned Pig. Alas! what is an author's popularity worth, in a world that can suffer a prostitute on one side, and a pig on the other, to eclipse his brightest glories? I am therefore sufficiently humbled by these considerations; and unless I should hereafter be ordained to engross the public attention by means more magnificent than a song, am persuaded that I shall suffer no real detriment by their applause. I have produced many things, under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted to spring. But if the soil of that melancholy, in which I have walked so long, has thrown up here and there an unprofitable fungus, it is well, at least, that it is not chargeable with having brought forth poison. Like you, I see, or think I can see, that Gilpin may have his use. Causes, in appearance trivial, produce often the most beneficial consequences; and perhaps my volumes may now travel to a distance, which, if they had not been ushered into the world by that notable horseman, they would never have reached.

I hope that neither the master of St. Paul's or any other school, who may have commenced my admirer on John's account, will write to me for such a reason; yet a little while, and if they have laughed with me, their note will be changed, and perhaps they will revile me. *Tirocinium* is no friend of theirs, on the contrary, if it have the effect I wish it to have, it will prove much their enemy; for it gives no quarter to modern pedagogues, but finding them all alike guilty of supineness and neglect in the affair of morals, condemns them, both schoolmasters and heads of colleges, without distinction. Our temper differs somewhat from that of the ancient Jews. They would neither dance nor weep. We indeed weep not, if a man mourn unto us; but I must needs say, that, if he pipe, we seem disposed to dance with the greatest alacrity. I ought to tell you that this remark has a reference to *John Gilpin*, otherwise having been jumbled a little out of its place you might be at a loss for the explication.—

Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

April 30, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . You mention Bensley. I formerly knew the man you mention, but his elder brother much better. We were schoolfellows, and he was one of a club of seven Westminster men, to which I belonged, who dined together every Thursday. Should it please God to give me ability to perform the poet's part to some purpose, many whom I once called friends, but who have since treated me with a most magnificent indifference, will be ready to take me by the hand again, and some, whom I never held in that estimation, will, like Bensley (who was but a boy when I left London), boast of a connexion with me which they never had. Had I the virtues, and graces, and accomplishments of St. Paul himself, I might have them at Olney, and nobody would care a button about me, yourself and one or two more excepted. Fame begets favour; and one talent, if it be rubbed a little bright by use and practice, will procure a man more friends than a thousand virtues. Dr. Johnson, I remember, in the life of one of our poets (I believe of Savage), says, that he retired from the world, flattering himself that he should be regretted. But the world never missed him. I think his observation upon it is, that the vacancy made by the retreat of any individual is soon filled up; that a man may always be obscure, if he chooses to be so; and that he, who neglects the world, will be by the world neglected.

Your mother and I walked yesterday in the Wilderness. As we entered the gate, a glimpse of something white, contained in a little hole in the gate-post, caught my eye. I looked again, and discovered a bird's nest, with two tiny eggs in it. By and by they will be fledged, and tailed, and get wing-feathers, and fly. My case is somewhat similar to that of the parent bird. My nest is in a little nook. Here I brood and hatch, and in due time my progeny takes wing and whistles.

We wait for the time of your coming with pleasant expectation.—Yours truly, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

June 4, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . We have lately been well taken in, to speak in the jockey phrase, or to speak more classically, duped and imposed upon. A certain short man with a rosy round face, and a protuberant belly, calling himself Mr. Crawford, minister of a dissenting congregation in the Borough, attended us one day last week with a petition from his church for assistance towards payment of a debt incurred by rebuilding their meeting-house. Mrs. Unwin received him in the parlour. I was in the garden and was called in. Notwithstanding that physiognomy has, by the ingenious Mr. Lavater, been at length improved into a science, yet having never made it my particular study, I am with reason apt to distrust my own skill in the interpretation of features. On this occasion, however, a better opinion of my proficiency would have been advantageous to myself, and I should have done the object of it no wrong. The moment I saw him, something seemed to say to me, 'That fellow is a rascal!' I rejected the information, to which had I given due credit, I should have saved five shillings. From this place he went to Towcester, gleaning however all that he could get at Wellingborough, and at other places by the way. At Towcester, a little on this side of the town, he was seen by Mr. Shepherd, a dissenting minister of that place, leading a female companion into a wood at no great distance from the road, whom he saw him pick up as he went. Arriving not long after in the town of Towcester, he began immediately to exercise his petitioning talents, and calling in the first place upon Mr. Shepherd, was of course not a little surprised to find that he encountered, in that gentleman, an eye-witness of his shame. He denied the charge at first, but at length,

being hard pushed, confessed it, and had the impudence to plead the festivity of the season in his excuse, it being fair-time at Towcester, and the road consequently abounding with objects of temptation. He had drank, he said, a little too freely, and was therefore not sufficiently on his guard. Mr. Scott received this narrative from Mr. Shepherd, and I from Mr. Scott. The report of his offence flying before him, and meeting him in every place, his harvest in this part of the world at least was over. Accordingly he found it necessary to return. In his way to town, he passed again through Olney, not suspecting that his ill-savour had been wafted this way also. Mr. Wilson saw him, and as soon as he could followed him, overtook him upon the bridge, related to him what he had heard, and begged him, if he had the means of justification in his power, and valued either his own character, or the Gospel that he preached (for he had preached at Olney), to return and clear himself. He answered, that he valued his character highly, but that he had left some clean linen at Newport, and it was indispensably necessary that he should inquire after it. In vain Mr. Wilson assured him that a clear character was of more importance than a clean shirt; he persisted in his purpose, promising to return and to exculpate himself either in the evening or the next morning. But unhappily some other very important hindrance intervened, and he never came.—I have told you this long story, merely to guard you against such a vagrant, should he come in your way, which I thought not impossible. It is true, however (for inquiry has been made), that he is a minister, that he ministers in the Borough, and that his meeting-house has been rebuilt. . . .—Yours, my dear Friend, with much affection, W. C.

To Master John Unwin

June 12, 1785.

John, once the Little, but now almost the Great, and promising to be altogether such in time, make

yourself master of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey* as soon as you can, and then you will be master of two of the finest poems that ever were composed by man, and composed in the finest language that ever man uttered. All languages of which I know anything are gibberish compared with Greek. WM. C.

To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

June 25, 1785.

My dear Friend—I write in a nook that I call my Boudoir. It is a summer-house not much bigger than a sedan chair, the door of which opens into the garden, that is now crowded with pinks, roses, and honeysuckles, and the window into my neighbour's orchard. It formerly served an apothecary, now dead, as a smoking-room; and under my feet is a trap-door, which once covered a hole in the ground, where he kept his bottles. At present, however, it is dedicated to sublimer uses. Having lined it with garden mats, and furnished it with a table and two chairs, here I write all that I write in summer-time, whether to my friends, or to the public. It is secure from all noise, and refuge from all intrusion; for intruders sometimes trouble me in the winter evenings at Olney. But (thanks to my Boudoir!) I can now hide myself from them. A poet's retreat is sacred. They acknowledge the truth of that proposition, and never presume to violate it. . . . W. C.

To the Rev. JOHN NEWTON

July 9, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . I told you, I believe, that the Spinney has been cut down; and, though it may seem sufficient to have mentioned such an occurrence once, I cannot help recurring to the melancholy theme. Last night, at near nine o'clock, we entered it for the first time this summer. We had not walked many yards in it, before we perceived that

this pleasant retreat is destined never to be a pleasant retreat again. In one more year, the whole will be a thicket. That which was once the serpentine walk is now in a state of transformation, and is already become as woody as the rest. Poplars and elms without number are springing in the turf. They are now as high as the knee. Before the summer is ended, they will be twice as high; and the growth of another season will make them trees. It will then be impossible for any but a sportsman and his dog to penetrate it. The desolation of the whole scene is such, that it sunk our spirits. The ponds are dry. The circular one, in front of the hermitage, is filled with flags and rushes; so that, if it contains any water, not a drop is visible. The weeping willow at the side of it, the only ornamental plant that has escaped the axe, is dead. The ivy and the moss, with which the hermitage was lined, are torn away; and the very mats that covered the benches have been stripped off, rent in tatters, and trodden under foot. So farewell, Spinney; I have promised myself that I will never enter it again. We have both prayed in it: you for me, and I for you. But it is desecrated from this time forth, and the voice of prayer will be heard in it no more. The fate of it in this respect, however deplorable, is not peculiar. The spot where Jacob anointed his pillar, and, which is more apposite, the spot once honoured with the presence of Him who dwelt in the bush, have long since suffered similar disgrace, and are become common ground. . . .— Yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

July 27, 1785.

My dear William— . . . You had been gone two days when a violent thunderstorm came over us. I was passing out of the parlour into the hall, with Mungo at my heels, when a flash seemed to fill the room with fire. In the same instant came the clap,

so that the explosion was (I suppose) perpendicular to the roof. Mungo's courage upon the tremendous occasion constrained me to smile, in spite of the solemn impression that such an event never fails to affect me with;—the moment that he heard the thunder (which was like the burst of a great gun), with a wrinkled forehead, and with eyes directed to the ceiling, whence the sound seemed to proceed, he barked; but he barked exactly in concert with the thunder. It thundered once, and he barked once; and so precisely in the very instant when the thunder happened, that both sounds seemed to begin and to end together. Some dogs will clap their tails close, and sneak into a corner, at such a time, but Mungo, it seems, is of a more fearless family. A house at no great distance from ours was the mark to which the lightning was directed; it knocked down the chimney, split the building, and carried away the corner of the next house, in which lay a fellow drunk, and asleep upon his bed;—it roused and terrified him, and he promises to get drunk no more; but I have seen a woeful end of many such conversions. I remember but one such storm at Olney since I have known the place; and I am glad that it did not happen two days sooner for the sake of the ladies, who would probably, one of them at least, have been alarmed by it. . . .

Be not sorry that your love of Christ was excited in you by a picture. Could a dog or a cat suggest to me the thought that Christ is precious, I would not despise that thought because a dog or cat suggested it. The meanness of the instrument cannot debase the nobleness of the principle. He that kneels before a picture of Christ, is an idolater; but he in whose heart the sight of such a picture kindles a warm remembrance of the Saviour's sufferings, must be a Christian. Suppose that I dream, as Gardiner did, that Christ walks before me, that He turns and smiles upon me, and fills my soul with ineffable love and joy: will a man tell me that I am deceived, that I ought not to love or rejoice

in Him for such a reason, because a dream is merely a picture drawn upon the imagination? I hold not with such divinity. To love Christ is the greatest dignity of man, be that affection wrought in him how it may. . . .—Yours ever, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Sept. 24, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . I remember Southampton well, having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly-room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fireside, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air, and wore trousers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea life, who take long voyages, you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I;—I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it, under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing

any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgement of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah was, when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop, the *Harriet*.

In my last, I wrote you word that Mr. Perry was given over by his friends, and pronounced a dead man by his physician. Just when I had reached the end of the foregoing paragraph, he came in. His errand hither was to bring two letters, which I enclose; one is to yourself, in which he will give you, I doubt not, such an account both of his body and mind, as will make all that I might say upon those subjects superfluous. The only consequences of his illness seem to be, that he looks a little pale, and that though always a most excellent man, he is still more angelic than he was. Illness sanctified is better than health. But I know a man who has been a sufferer by a worse illness than his, almost these fourteen years, and who at present is only the worse for it. . . .—Believe me, my dear Friend, with true affection, yours,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Oct. 12, 1785.

My dear Cousin—It is no new thing with you to give pleasure; but I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself: 'This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I

thought I should see no more are actually returned.' You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value: if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment, but I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply, as to feel no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas. I should remember him, indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance), and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof that he could give, of a judgement that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me: that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my Cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary; an attention, and a care, that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularize only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much; but to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth, is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy, for the most part, are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear Cousin, dejection of spirits, which, I suppose, may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally, three hours in a morning, and in the evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have

bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Aye, and the winters also; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never I believe a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved Cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.—Yours, my dear Friend and Cousin, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Oct. 16, 1785.

My dear Friend—To have sent a child to heaven is a great honour and a great blessing, and your feelings on such an occasion may well be such as render you rather an object of congratulation than of condolence. And were it otherwise, yet, having yourself free access to all the sources of genuine consolation, I feel that it would be little better than impertinence in me to suggest any. An escape from a life of suffering to a life of happiness and glory, is such a deliverance as leaves no room for the sorrow of survivors, unless they sorrow for themselves. We cannot, indeed, lose what we love without regretting it; but a Christian is in possession of such alleviations of that regret, as the world knows nothing of. Their beloveds, when they die, go they know not whither; and if they suppose them, as they generally do, in a state of happiness, they have yet but an indifferent prospect of joining them in that state hereafter. But it is not so with you. You both know whither your beloved is gone, and you know that you shall follow her; and you know also that in the meantime she is incomparably happier than yourself. . . —Sincerely yours, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Oct. 22, 1785.

My dear William— . . . I perfectly approve of your course with John. The most entertaining books are the best to begin with, and none in the world, so far as entertainment is concerned, deserves the preference to Homer. Neither do I know that there is anywhere to be found Greek of easier construction,—poetical Greek I mean; and as for prose, I should recommend Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. That also is a most amusing narrative, and ten times easier to understand than the crabbed epigrams and scribblements of the minor poets, that are generally put into the hands of boys. I took particular notice of the neatness of John's Greek character, which (let me tell you) deserves its share of commendation; for to write the language legibly is not the lot of every man who can read it. Witness myself for one. . . . W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Nov. 5, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . The vanity of human attainments was never so conspicuously exemplified as in the present day. The sagacious moderns make discoveries, which, how useful they may prove to themselves I know not; certainly they do no honour to the ancients. Homer and Virgil have enjoyed (if the dead have any enjoyments) an unrivalled reputation as poets through a long succession of ages: but it is now shrewdly suspected that Homer did not compose the poems for which he has been so long applauded; and it is even asserted by a certain Robert Heron, Esq., that Virgil never wrote a line worth reading. He is a pitiful plagiary; he is a servile imitator, a bungler in his plan, and has not a thought in his whole work that will bear examination. In short, he is anything but what the literati for two thousand years have taken him to be—a man of genius, and a

fine writer. I fear that Homer's case is desperate. After the lapse of so many generations, it would be a difficult matter to elucidate a question which time and modern ingenuity together combine to puzzle. And I suppose that it were in vain for an honest plain man to inquire, 'If Homer did not write the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, who did?' The answer would undoubtedly be, 'It is no matter; he did not: which is all that I undertook to prove.' For Virgil, however, there still remains some consolation. The very same Mr. Heron, who finds no beauties in the *Aeneid*, discovers not a single instance of the sublime in Scripture. Particularly, he says, speaking of the Prophets, that Ezekiel, although the filthiest of all writers, is the best of them. He, therefore, being the first of the learned who has reprobated even the style of the Scriptures, may possibly make the fewer proselytes to his judgement of a heathen writer. For my own part, at least, had I been accustomed to doubt whether the *Aeneid* were a noble composition or not, this gentleman would at once have decided the question for me; and I should have been immediately assured, that a work must necessarily abound in beauties that had the happiness to displease a censurer of the Word of God. What enterprises will not an inordinate passion for fame suggest? It prompted one man to fire the Temple of Ephesus; another, to fling himself into a volcano; and now has induced this wicked and unfortunate squire either to deny his own feelings, or to publish to all the world that he has no feelings at all.

This being the fifth of November, is the worst of all days in the year for letter-writing. Continually called upon to remember the bonfire, one is apt to forget everything else. The boys at Olney have likewise a very entertaining sport, which commences annually upon this day: they call it Hockey; and it consists in dashing each other with mud, and the windows also, so that I am forced to rise now and then, and to threaten them with a horsewhip, to preserve our own. We know that the Roman boys whipped tops, trundled

the hoop, and played at tennis; but I believe we nowhere read that they delighted in these filthy aspersions: I am inclined, therefore, to give to the slovenly but ingenious youths of Olney full credit for the invention. It will be well if the Sunday school may civilize them to a taste for more refined amusements. That measure is so far in forwardness that a subscription is made; but it amounts, I am told, to no more than nineteen pounds; a feeble beginning, which, as taxes are continually growing, promises no long duration. . . .—Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, Nov. 9, 1785.

My dearest Cousin—Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer two days sooner than the post will serve me; I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it, or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste, with which you both relish what you like, and after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But above all, I honour *John Gilpin*, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am

now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to, the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable. My benevolent and generous Cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted anything, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply, yes. Whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner-soever you please; and add moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced, and do not much exceed my own; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when it was best, it would not have enabled me to live as my connexions demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time by the help of good management, and a

clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved Cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.

I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done: there is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road, by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my Cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years; I am not indeed grown grey so much as I am grown bald. No matter: there was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me; accordingly having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own, that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black riband about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often! W. C.

P.S.—That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items—That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

To Lady Hesketh

[*No date*] 1785.

My dearest Cousin—I am glad that I always loved you as I did. It releases me from any occasion to suspect that my present affection for you is indebted for its existence to any selfish considerations. No, I am sure I love you disinterestedly, and for your own

sake, because I never thought of you with any other sensations than those of the truest affection, even while I was under the influence of a persuasion that I should never hear from you again. But with my present feelings, superadded to those that I always had for you, I find it no easy matter to do justice to my sensations. I perceive myself in a state of mind similar to that of the traveller, described in Pope's *Messiah*, who, as he passes through a sandy desert, starts at the sudden and unexpected sound of a waterfall. You have placed me in a situation new to me, and in which I feel myself somewhat puzzled how I ought to behave. At the same time that I would not grieve you, by putting a check upon your bounty, I would be as careful not to abuse it, as if I were a miser, and the question not about your money, but my own.

Although I do not suspect that a secret to you, my Cousin, is any burthen, yet having maturely considered that point, since I wrote my last, I feel myself altogether disposed to release you from the injunction, to that effect, under which I laid you. I have now made such a progress in my translation, that I need neither fear that I shall stop short of the end, nor that any rider of Pegasus should overtake me. Therefore if at any time it should fall fairly in your way, or you should feel yourself invited to say I am so occupied, you have my poetship's free permission. Dr. Johnson read, and recommended my first volume.

W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Nov. 9, 1785.

My dear Friend—You desired me to return your good brother the bishop's charge as soon as I conveniently could, and the weather having forbidden us to hope for the pleasure of seeing you, and Mrs. Bagot with you, this morning, I return it now, lest, as you told me that your stay in this country would be short, you should be gone before it could reach you.

I wish, as you do, that the charge in question could

find its way into all the parsonages in the nation. It is so generally applicable, and yet so pointedly enforced, that it deserves the most extensive spread. I find in it the happiest mixture of spiritual authority, the meekness of a Christian, and the good manners of a gentleman. It has convinced me, that the poet, who, like myself, shall take the liberty to pay the author of such valuable admonition a compliment, shall do at least as much honour to himself as to his subject.—
Yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, Nov. 23, 1785.

My dear Cousin— . . . Fifty things present themselves to me that I want to say, and while each pleads for the preference, they all together so distract my choice that I hardly know with which to begin.

I thank you, my dearest Cousin, for your medical advice. I have tried other wines, but never could meet with any that I could drink constantly but port, without being the worse for it. And with respect to the quantity, that is a point that habit so effectually decides, that after many years' practice, a limitation to a certain stint becomes in a manner necessary. When I have drank what I always drink, I can feel that more would disgust me. I have, indeed, a most troublesome stomach, and which does not improve as I grow older. I have eaten nothing for some time past that it has not quarrelled with, from my bread and butter in the morning down to the egg that I generally make my supper. It constrains me to deny myself some things that I am fond of, and some that are in a degree necessary to health, or that seem to be so. Green tea I have not touched these twenty years, or only to be poisoned by it: but bohea, which never hurts me, is so good a substitute, that I am perfectly well satisfied upon that head. Less easy, however, do I find it to reconcile myself to an almost total abstinence from all vegetables, which yet I have been obliged to practise for some time. But enough, and too much by half,

upon a subject that shall never again engross so large a portion of the paper that I devote to you.

You supposed in a former letter that Mrs. Cowper, of Devonshire Street, has written to me since I saw the rest of the family. Not so, my dear. Whatever intelligence she gave you concerning me, she had it from the Newtons, whom she visits. Yourself was the last of my female relations that I saw before I went to St. Albans. You do not forget, I daresay, that you and Sir Thomas called upon me in my chamber, a very few days before I took leave of London: then it was that I saw you last, and then it was that I said in my heart, upon your going out at the door, Farewell! there will be no more intercourse between us for ever. But Providence has ordered otherwise, and I cannot help saying once more, how sincerely I rejoice that He has. It were pity that, while the same world holds us, we, who were in a manner brought up together, should not love each other to the last. We do, however, and we do so in spite of a long separation; and although that separation should be for life, yet will we love each other.

I intended to have been very merry when I began, but I stumbled unawares upon a subject that made me otherwise; but if I have been a little sad, yet not disagreeably so to myself. That you admire Mr. Pitt, my dear, may be, for aught I know, as you say it is, a very shining part of your character; but a more illustrious part of it, in my account, is your kindness and affection to me. Sweet self, you know, will always claim a right to be first considered, a claim which few people are much given to dispute. Upon the subject of politics you may make me just what you please. I am perfectly prepared to adopt all your opinions, for living when and as I do, it is impossible that I should have any decided ones of my own. My mind, therefore, is as much a *carte blanche* in this particular as you can wish. Write upon it what you please. I know well that I honoured his father, and that I have cut capers before now for victories obtained under his

auspices; and although capering opportunities have become scarce since he died, yet I am equally ready even now to caper for his son when a reasonable occasion should offer. As to the King, I love and honour him upon a hundred accounts; and have, indeed, but one quarrel with him in the world; which is, that after having hunted a noble and beautiful animal, till he takes it perhaps at last in a lady's parlour, he in a few days turns it up and hunts it again. When stags are followed by such people as generally follow them, it is very well: their pursuers are men who do not pretend to much humanity, and when they discover none, they are perfectly consistent with themselves; but I have a far different opinion of the character of our King: he is a merciful man, and should therefore be more merciful to his beast. . . .

My dearest Cousin, if you give me wine, there is no good reason wherefore you should also be at the expense of bottles, of which we could not possibly make any other use than to furnish the rack with them, where the cats would break them. I purpose, therefore, to return the hamper charged with the same number that it brings, by your permission. The difference will be sixteen shillings in the price of the wine. . . . —Ever yours, WM. C.

P.S.—The kindness of that concern you take in the affairs of my stomach calls upon me to be a little more particular. I have tried Madeira, and find that it heats me in the night. Sherry I understand to be a creator of appetite, which I do not want. I am taking bark and steel, from which I expect much. Mine is merely a case of relaxation.

TO LADY HESKETH

Nov. 30, 1785.

My dearest Cousin—Your kindness reduces me to a necessity (a pleasant one, indeed), of writing all my letters in the same terms: always thanks,—thanks at the beginning, and thanks at the end. It is, however, I say, a pleasant employment when those thanks are

indeed the language of the heart: and I can truly add, that there is no person on earth whom I thank with so much affection as yourself. You insisted that I should give you my genuine opinion of the wine. By the way, it arrived without the least damage or fracture, and I finished the first bottle of it this very day. It is excellent, and though the wine which I had been used to drink was not bad, far preferable to that. The bottles will be in town on Saturday. I am enamoured of the desk and its contents before I see them. They will be most entirely welcome. A few years since I made Mrs. Unwin a present of a snuff-box—a silver one; the purchase was made in London by a friend; it is of a size and form that make it more fit for masculine than feminine use. She therefore with pleasure accepts the box which you have sent,—I should say with the greatest pleasure. And I, discarding the leathern trunk that I have used so long, shall succeed to the possession of hers. She says, Tell Lady Hesketh that I truly love and honour her. Now, my Cousin, you may depend upon it, as a most certain truth, that these words from her lips are not an empty sound. I never in my life heard her profess a regard for any one that she felt not. She is not addicted to the use of such language upon ordinary occasions; but when she speaks it, speaks from the heart. She has baited me this many a day, even as a bear is baited, to send for Dr. Kerr. But, as I hinted to you upon a former occasion, I am as mulish as most men are, and have hitherto most gallantly refused; but what is to be done now?—If it were uncivil not to comply with the solicitations of one lady, to be unmoved by the solicitations of two would prove me to be a bear indeed. I will, therefore, summon him to consideration of said stomach, and its ailments, without delay, and you shall know the result.—I have read Goldsmith's *Traveller* and his *Deserted Village*, and am highly pleased with them both, as well for the manner in which they are executed, as for their tendency, and the lessons that they inculcate.

Mrs. Unwin said to me a few nights since, after supper, 'I have two fine fowls in feeding, and just fit for use; I wonder whether I should send them to Lady Hesketh?' I replied, Yes, by all means! and I will tell you a story that will at once convince you of the propriety of doing so. My brother was curate on a time to Mr. Fawkes, of Orpington, in Kent: it was when I lived in the Temple. One morning, as I was reading by the fireside, I heard a prodigious lumbering at the door. I opened it, and beheld a most rural figure, with very dirty boots, and a great-coat as dirty. Supposing that my great fame as a barrister had drawn upon me a client from some remote region, I desired him to walk in. He did so, and introduced himself to my acquaintance by telling me that he was the farmer with whom my brother lodged at Orpington. After this preliminary information he unbuttoned his great-coat, and I observed a quantity of long feathers projected from an inside pocket. He thrust in his hand, and with great difficulty extracted a great fat capon. He then proceeded to lighten the other side of him, by dragging out just such another, and begged my acceptance of both. I sent them to a tavern, where they were dressed, and I with two or three friends, whom I invited to the feast, found them incomparably better than any fowls that we had ever tasted from the London coops. Now, said I to Mrs. Unwin, it is likely that the fowls at Olney may be as good as the fowls at Orpington, therefore send them; for it is not possible to make so good a use of them in any other way. . . . Adieu, my faithful, kind, and consolatory Friend!—Ever, ever yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 3, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . I also am employed in writing narrative, but not so useful. Employment, however, and with the pen, is, through habit, become essential to my well-being; and to produce always original poems,

especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished *The Task*, and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the *Iliad*; and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception of what I was then entering upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work: till at last I began to reflect thus:—The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together consists of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man, that, although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work that, ere long, I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connexions, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that

a brisk circulation may be procured; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not, indeed, lie much in your way to promote; but, among your numerous connexions, it is possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean—far be it from me—to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you though but a moment's pain. You know best your own opportunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will. . . .

The morning is beautiful, and tempts me forth into the garden. It is all the walk that I can have at this season, but not all the exercise. I ring a peal every day upon the dumb-bells.—I am, my dear Friend, most truly, yours and Mrs. Newton's, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, Dec. 6, 1785.

My dear Cousin—I write not *upon* my desk, but *about* it. Having in vain expected it by the wagon that followed your letter, I again expected it by the next; and thinking it likely that it might arrive last night at Sherrington, I sent a man over thither this morning, hoping to see him return with it; but again I am disappointed. I have felt an impatience to receive it that you yourself have taught me, and now think it necessary to let you know that it is not come, lest it should perhaps be detained in London, by the negligence of somebody to whom you might entrust the packing of it, or its carriage to the inn.

I shall be obliged to be more concise than I choose to be when I write to you, for want of time to indulge myself in writing more. How, will you say, can a man want time, who lives in the country, without business,

and without neighbours, who visits nobody, and who is visited himself so seldom? My dear, I have been at the races this morning, and have another letter to write this evening; the post sets out at seven, and it is now drawing near to six. A fine day, you will say, for the races, and the better, no doubt, because it has rained continually ever since the morning. At what races do you suppose that I have been? I might leave you to guess, but loving you too well to leave you under the burthen of an employment that must prove for ever vain, I will even tell you, and keep you no longer in suspense. I have been at Troy, where the principal heroes of the *Iliad* have been running for such a prize as our jockeys would disdain to saddle a horse for; and yet I assure you they acquitted themselves most nobly, though a kettle and a frying-pan were to reward their labours.

I never answered your question concerning my strong partiality to a common. I well remember making the speech of which you remind me, and the very place where I made it was upon a common, in the neighbourhood of Southampton, the name of which, however, I have forgot. But I perfectly recollect that I boasted of the sagacity that you mention just after having carried you over a dirty part of the road that led to it. My nostrils have hardly been regaled with those wild odours from that day to the present. We have no such here. If there ever were any such in this country, the enclosures have long since destroyed them; but we have a scent in the fields about Olney, that to me is equally agreeable, and which, even after attentive examination, I have never been able to account for. It proceeds, so far as I can find, neither from herb, nor tree, nor shrub: I should suppose therefore that it is in the soil. It is exactly the scent of amber when it has been rubbed hard, only more potent. I have never observed it except in hot weather, or in places where the sun shines powerfully, and from which the air is excluded. I had a strong poetical desire to describe it when I was writing the Common-scene in *The Task*, but

feared lest the infrequency of such a singular property in the earth, should have tempted the reader to ascribe it to a fanciful nose, at least to have suspected it for a deliberate fiction. . . .

Mrs. Unwin (who begs to be mentioned to you with affectionate respect), sits knitting my stockings at my elbow, with a degree of industry worthy of Penelope herself. You will not think this an exaggeration when I tell you that I have not bought a pair these twenty years, either of thread, silk, or worsted.

Adieu, my most beloved Cousin; if you get this before I have an answer to my last, let me soon have an answer to them both.—Truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH *Dec.* 7, 1785.

My dear Cousin—At this time last night I was writing to you, and now I am writing to you again. . . .

My dear, you say not a word about the desk in your last, which I received this morning. I infer from your silence that you supposed it either at Olney or on its way thither, and that you expected nothing so much as that my next would inform you of its safe arrival;—therefore, where can it possibly be? I am not absolutely in despair about it, for the reasons that I mentioned last night; but to say the truth, I stand tottering upon the verge of it. I write, and have written these many years, upon a book of maps, which I now begin to find too low and too flat, though till I expected a better desk, I found no fault with *them*. See and observe how true it is, that by increasing the number of our conveniences, we multiply our wants exactly in the same proportion! neither can I at all doubt that if you were to tell me that all the men in London of any fashion at all, wore black velvet shoes with white roses, and should also tell me that you would send me such, I should dance with impatience till they arrived. Not because I care one farthing of what materials my shoes are made, but because any shoes of your sending would interest me from head to foot.

Thursday Evening.

Oh that this letter had wings, that it might fly to tell you that my desk, the most elegant, the compactest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that ever were or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most, is safe arrived. Nay, my dear, it was actually at Sherrington, when the wagoner's wife (for the man himself was not at home), croaked out her abominable *No!* yet she examined the bill of lading, but either did it so carelessly, or as poor Dick Madan used to say, with such an *ignorant eye*, that my name escaped her. My precious Cousin, you have bestowed too much upon me. I have nothing to render you in return, but the affectionate feelings of a heart most truly sensible of your kindness. How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank! I am sorry that I have so nearly reached the end of my paper. I have now however only room to say that Mrs. Unwin is delighted with her box, and bids me do more than thank you for it. What can I do more at this distance but say that she loves you heartily, and that so do I? The pocket-book is also the completest that I ever saw, and the watch-chain the most brilliant.

Adieu for a little while. Now for Homer.—My dear, yours, WM. C.

N.B.—I generally write the day before the post sets out, which is the thing that puzzles you. I do it that I may secure time for the purpose, and may not be hurried. On this very day twenty-two years ago I left London.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 10, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . Your sentiments of Pope's Homer agree perfectly with those of every competent judge with whom I have at any time conversed about it. I never saw a copy so unlike the original. There is not, I believe, in all the world to be found an uninspired poem so simple as those of Homer; nor in all

the world a poem more bedizened with ornaments than Pope's translation of them. Accordingly, the sublime of Homer in the hands of Pope becomes bloated and tumid, and his description tawdry. Neither had Pope the faintest conception of those exquisite discriminations of character for which Homer is so remarkable. All his persons, and equally upon all occasions, speak in an inflated and strutting phraseology, as Pope has managed them; although in the original, the dignity of their utterance, even when they are most majestic, consists principally in the simplicity of their sentiments and of their language. Another censure I must needs pass upon our Anglo-Grecian, out of many that obtrude themselves upon me, but for which I have neither time to spare, nor room; which is, that with all his great abilities he was defective in his feelings to a degree that some passages in his own poems make it difficult to account for. No writer more pathetic than Homer, because none more natural: and because none less natural than Pope in his version of Homer, therefore than he none less pathetic. But I shall tire you with a theme with which I would not wish to cloy you beforehand. . . .—Yours, my dear Friend, affectionately and faithfully, WM. COWPER.

To LADY HESKETH

Thursday, Dec. 15, 1785.

Dearest Cousin—My desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come in spite of all my objections. Before it arrived, Mrs. Unwin had spied out for it a place that exactly suits it. A certain fly-table in the corner of the room, which I had overlooked, affords it a convenient stand when it is not wanted, and it is easily transferred to a larger when it is. If I must not know to whom I am principally indebted for it, at least let me entreat you to make my acknowledgements of

gratitude and love. As to my frequent use of it, I will tell you how that matter stands. When I was writing my first volume, and was but just beginning to emerge from a state of melancholy that had continued some years (from which, by the way, I do not account myself even now delivered), Mrs. Unwin insisted on my relinquishing the pen, apprehending consequences injurious to my health. When ladies insist, you know, there is an end of the business; obedience on our part becomes necessary. I accordingly obeyed, but having lost my fiddle, I became pensive and unhappy; she therefore restored it to me, convinced of its utility, and from that day to this I have never ceased to scrape. Observe, however, my dear, that I scrape not always. My task that I assign myself is to translate forty lines a day; if they pass off easily I sometimes make them fifty, but never abate any part of the allotted number. Perhaps I am occupied an hour and a half, perhaps three hours; but generally between two and three. This, you see, is labour that can hurt no man; and what I have translated in the morning, in the evening I transcribe. . . .

With respect to the enterprise itself, there are certain points of delicacy that will not suffer me to make a public justification of it. It would ill become me avowedly to point out the faults of Pope in a preface, and would be as impolitic as indecent. But to you, my dear, I can utter my mind freely. Let me premise, however, that you answered the gentleman's inquiry, whether in blank verse or not, to a marvel. It is even so; and let some critics say what they will, I aver it, and will for ever aver it, that to give a just representation of Homer in rhyme, is a natural impossibility. Now for Pope himself: I will allow his whole merit. He has written a great deal of very musical and sweet verse in his translation of Homer, but his verse is not universally such; on the contrary, it is often lame, feeble, and flat. He has, besides, occasionally a felicity of expression peculiar to himself; but it is a felicity purely modern, and has nothing to do with Homer. Except the Bible, there never was in the world a book

so remarkable for that species of the sublime that owes its very existence to simplicity, as the works of Homer. He is always nervous, plain, natural. I refer you to your own knowledge of his copyist for a decision upon Pope's merits in these particulars. The garden in all the gaiety of June is less flowery than his Translation. Metaphors of which Homer never dreamt, which he did not seek, and which probably he would have disdained if he had found, follow each other in quick succession like the sliding pictures in a show-box. Homer is, on occasions that call for such a style, the easiest and most familiar of all writers; a circumstance that escaped Pope entirely, who takes most religious care that he shall everywhere strut in buckram. The speeches of his heroes are often animated to a degree that Pope no doubt accounted unmannerly and rude, for he has reduced numbers of them that are of that character to the perfect standard of French good-breeding. Shakespeare himself did not excel Homer in discrimination of character, neither is he more attentive to exact consistence and preservation of it throughout. In Pope, to whatever cause it was owing, whether he did not see it, or seeing it, accounted it an affair of no moment, this great beauty is almost absolutely annihilated. In short, my dear, there is hardly anything in the world so unlike another, as Pope's version of Homer to the original. Give me a great corking pin that I may stick your faith upon my sleeve. There—it is done. Now assure yourself, upon the credit of a man who made Homer much his study in his youth, and who is perhaps better acquainted with Pope's translation of him than almost any man, having twenty-five years ago compared them with each other line by line throughout; upon the credit of a man, too, who would not for the world deceive you in the smallest matter, that Pope never entered into the spirit of Homer; that he never translated him; I had almost said, did not understand him: many passages it is literally true that he did not. Why, when he first entered on his task, did he (as he did, by his own con-

fession) for ever dream that he was wandering in unknown ways, that he was lost upon heaths and forests, and awoke in terror? I will tell you, my dear, his dreams were emblems of his waking experience; and I am mistaken, if I could not go near to prove that at his first setting out, he knew very little of Greek, and was never an adept in it, to the last. Therefore, my beloved Cousin, once more take heart. I have a fair opportunity to acquire honour; and if when I have finished the *Iliad*, I do not upon cool consideration think that I have secured it, I will burn the copy.

Saturday.

I must now huddle up twenty matters in a corner. No Kerr yet: a report prevails in our town that he is very ill, and I am very sorry if he is. I were no better than a beast could I forget to thank you for an order of oysters through the season. I love you for all your kindnesses, and for this among the rest. I wrote lately to Johnson on the subject of Homer. He is a knowing man in his trade, and understands booksellers' trap as well as any man. He wishes me not to publish by subscription, but to put my copy into his hands. He thinks he can make me such proposals as I shall like. I shall answer him to-day, and not depart from my purpose. But I consider his advice as a favourable omen. The last post brought me a very obliging letter from the above-said Mr. Smith. I shall answer it to-day, and shall make my intended application for his interest in behalf of my subscription. I always take care to have sufficient exercise every day. When the weather forbids walking, I ring a thousand bob-majors upon the dumb-bells. You would be delighted to see the performance. Again, I say that I love you, and I do so in particular for the interest that you took in the success of the passages that you say were read in the evening party that you mention. I know the friendly warmth of your heart, and how valuable a thing it is to have a share in it. The hare was caught by a shepherd's-dog, that had not the fear of the law before his

eyes; was transferred by the shepherd to the clerk of the parish, and by him presented to us. Mrs. Unwin is ever deeply sensible of your kind remembrances of her. Her son is sometimes in Town, and if you permit him, will, I doubt not, rejoice to give a morning rap at your door, upon the first intimation of such permission from me, whenever opportunity shall offer.

Now farewell, my dearest Cousin, and deservedly my most beloved Friend, farewell.—With true affection yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Dec. 24, 1785.

My dear Friend— . . . Let me sing the praises of the desk which my dear cousin has sent me. In general, it is as elegant as possible. In particular, it is of cedar, beautifully lacquered. When put together, it assumes the form of a handsome small chest, contains all sorts of accommodations, is furnished with cut glass for ink and sand, and is hinged, handled, and mounted with silver. It is inlaid with ivory, and serves the purpose of a reading-desk. It came stored with stationery of all sorts, and this splendid sheet is a part of it. The snuff-box, a present to your mother, is also very handsome. French paper, with a gold hinge, and bordered with an inlay of *concatenated gold*, as the Gods call it, but as men, with a gold chain.—Your affectionate

W. C.

TO GEORGE COLMAN

Dec. 27, 1785.

Dear Colman—For though we have not had any intercourse for more than twenty years, I cannot find in my heart to address you by any other style,—and I am the rather encouraged to the use of that in which I formerly addressed you, by a piece of intelligence that I received not long since from my friend Hill, who told me that you had inquired after me of him, and had said something about an intention to write to me. I

took pretty good care that you should not be ignorant of my having commenced author, by sending you my volume. The reason why I did not send you my second, was because you omitted to send me your *Art of Poetry*, which, in a splenetic mood I suppose, I construed into a prohibition. But Hill's subsequent information has cured me of that malady, as far as you were concerned.

Once an author, and always an author; this you know, my friend, is an axiom, and admits of no dispute. In my instance, at least, it is likely to hold good, for I have more leisure than it is possible to dispose of without writing. Accordingly I write everyday, and have everyday been writing, since I last published, till at last I have made such a progress in a new translation of Homer into blank verse, that I am upon the point of publishing again. Hitherto I have given away my copies; but having indulged myself in that frolic twice, I now mean to try whether it may not prove equally agreeable to get something by the bargain. I come therefore humbly to solicit your vote and interest, and to beg that you will help me in the circulation of my Proposals, for I shall publish by subscription. On such occasions, you know, a man sets every wheel in motion; and it would be strange indeed, if, not having a great many wheels to move, I should leave unattempted so important a one as yourself. As soon as I have your permission, I shall order my bookseller to send you some papers.

The news informed me of your illness, which gave me true concern, for time alone cannot efface the traces of such a friendship as I have felt for you,—no, nor even time with distance to help it. The news also told me that you were better; but to find that you are perfectly recovered, and to see it under your own hand, will give the greatest pleasure to one who can honestly subscribe himself to this day your very affectionate,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Dec. 31, 1785.

My dear William— . . . In particular I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability, when the Mann you mention applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples, but of verse never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed.

You never said a better thing in your life, than when you assured Mr. Smith of the expediency of a gift of bedding to the poor of Olney. There is no one article of this world's comforts, with which, as Falstaff says, they are so heinously unprovided. When a poor woman, and an honest one, whom we know well, carried home two pair of blankets, a pair for herself and husband, and a pair for her six children; as soon as the children saw them, they jumped out of their straw, caught them in their arms, kissed them, blessed them, and danced for joy. An old woman, a very old one, the first night that she found herself so comfortably covered, could not sleep a wink, being kept awake by the contrary emotions, of transport on the one hand, and the fear of not being thankful enough on the other. —Adieu, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Jan. 14, 1786.

My dear William—I am glad that you have seen Lady Hesketh. I knew that you would find her everything that is amiable and elegant. Else, being my relation, I would never have shown her to you. She also was delighted with her visitor, and expects the greatest pleasure in seeing you again; but is under some apprehensions that a tender regard for the drum of your ear may keep you from her. Never mind! you

have two drums; and if she should crack both, I will buy you a trumpet. . . .—Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Jan. 16, 1786.

My dearest Cousin— . . . Occasionally I am much distressed, but that distress becomes continually less frequent, and I think less violent. I find writing, and especially poetry, my best remedy. Perhaps, had I understood music, I had never written verse, but had lived upon fiddle-strings instead. It is better however as it is. A poet may, if he pleases, be of a little use in the world, while a musician, the most skilful, can only divert himself and a few others. I have been emerging gradually from this pit. As soon as I became capable of action, I commenced carpenter, made cupboards, boxes, stools. I grew weary of this in about a twelvemonth, and addressed myself to the making of birdcages. To this employment succeeded that of gardening, which I intermingled with that of drawing, but finding that the latter occupation injured my eyes, I renounced it, and commenced poet. I have given you, my dear, a little history in shorthand; I know that it will touch your feelings, but do not let it interest them too much. *In the year when I wrote 'The Task'* (for it occupied me about a year), *I was very often most supremely unhappy,* and am under God indebted in good part to that work for not having been much worse. You did not know what a clever fellow I am, and how I can turn my hand to anything.

I perceive that this time I shall make you pay double postage, and there is no help for it. Unless I write myself out now, I shall forget half of what I have to say. Now therefore for the interruptions at which I hinted. —There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of

our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden-walls above-said by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all, a measure the rather expedient, because in winter the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second), to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began *The Task*,— for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten, and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy: long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect *The Task* to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health, and before I quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I mentioned, was removed, and now, except the Bull that I spoke of, we have seldom any company at all. After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not

completely understand me perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add therefore, that having paid my morning visit, I walked; returning from my walk, I dressed; we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night. . . .

I know well, my Cousin, how formidable a creature you are when you become once outrageous. No sprat in a storm is half so terrible. But it is all in vain. You are at a distance, so we snap our fingers at you. Not that we have any more fowls at present. No, no; you may make yourself easy upon that subject. The coop is empty, and at this time of year cannot be replenished, but the spring will soon begin to advance. There are such things as eggs in the world, which eggs will, by incubation, be transformed, some of them into chickens, and others of them into ducklings. So muster up all your patience, for as sure as you live, if we live also, we shall put it to the trial. But seriously, you must not deny us one of the greatest pleasures we can have, which is, to give you now and then a little tiny proof how much we value you. We cannot sit with our hands before us, and be contented with only saying that we love Lady Hesketh.

The little item that you inserted in your cover, concerning a review of a certain author's work, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, excited Mrs. Unwin's curiosity to see it in a moment. In vain did I expostulate with her on the vanity of all things here below, especially of human praise, telling her what perhaps indeed she had heard before, but what on such an occasion I thought it not amiss to remind her of, that at the best it is but as the idle wind that whistles as it passes by, and that a little attention to the dictates of reason would presently give her the victory over all the curiosity that she felt so troublesome. For a short time, indeed, I prevailed, but the next day the fit returned upon her with more violence than before. She would see it,—she was resolved that she would see it that moment. You must know, my dear, that a watchmaker lives within two or three doors of us, who takes in the

said *Magazine* for a gentleman at some distance, and as it happened it had not been sent to its proper owner. Accordingly the messenger that the lady dispatched, returned with it, and she was gratified. As to myself, I read the article indeed, and read it to her; but I do not concern myself much you may suppose about such matters, and shall only make two or three cursory remarks, and so conclude. In the first place therefore, I observe that it is enough to craze a poor poet to see his verses so miserably misprinted, and which is worse if possible, his very praises in a manner annihilated, by a jumble of the lines out of their places, so that in two instances, the end of the period takes the lead of the beginning of it. The said poet has still the more reason to be crazed, because the said *Magazine* is in general singularly correct. But at Christmas, no doubt, your printer will get drunk as well as another man. It is astonishing to me that they know so exactly how much I translated of Voltaire. My recollection refreshed by them tells me that they are right in the number of the books that they affirm to have been translated by me, but till they brought the fact again to my mind, I myself had forgotten that part of the business entirely. My brother had twenty guineas for eight books of English *Henriade*, and I furnished him with four of them. They are not equally accurate in the affair of the Tame Mouse. That I kept one is certain, and that I kept it as they say, in my bureau,—but not in the Temple. It was while I was at Westminster. I kept it till it produced six young ones, and my transports when I first discovered them cannot easily be conceived,—any more than my mortification, when going again to visit my little family, I found that the mouse herself had eaten them! I turned her loose, in indignation, and vowed never to keep a mouse again. Who the writer of this article can be I am not able to imagine, nor where he had his information of these particulars. But they know all the world and everything that belongs to it. The mistake that has occasioned the mention of Unwin's name in the margin

would be ludicrous if it were not, inadvertently indeed, and innocently on their part, profane. I should have thought it impossible that when I spoke of One who had been wounded in the hands and in the side, any reader in a Christian land could have been for a moment at a loss for the Person intended.

Adieu, my dear Cousin; I intended that one of these should have served as a case for the other, but before I was aware of it, I filled both sheets completely. However, as your money burns in your pocket, there is no harm done. I shall not add a syllable more except that I am and, while I breathe, ever shall be, most truly yours, WM. COWPER.

Yes; one syllable more. Having just finished the *Iliad*, I was determined to have a deal of talk with you.

To LADY HESKETH

Olney, Jan. 31, 1786.

It is very pleasant, my dearest Cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself, therefore, driven by stress of necessity to the following resolution, viz. that I will constitute you my Thank-receiver-general for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my Cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honoured with; for a snuff-box of tortoise-shell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the foreground, and inscribed above with these words, *The Peasant's Nest*; and below with these, *Tiney, Puss, and Bess.* For all and every of these I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank you, that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand.—There! Now I am a little easier.

I have almost conceived a design to send up half a dozen stout country fellows to tie by the leg to their respective bed-posts the company that so abridges your opportunity of writing to me. Your letters are the joy of my heart, and I cannot endure to be robbed, by I know not whom, of half my treasure. . . . May God have you in His keeping, my beloved Cousin.—Farewell. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, Feb. 9, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so completely occupied by this tormenting specimen, that it was impossible to do it. I sent the General a letter on Monday, that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday, that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that, I doubt not, we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more, that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors, but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go

out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present: but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made: but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the farther end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my Cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him, whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be anything better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too.—Adieu! my dearest, dearest Cousin. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, Feb. 11, 1786.

My dearest Cousin— . . . I do not wish to remind the Chancellor of his promise. Ask you why, my

Cousin? Because I suppose it would be impossible. He has, no doubt, forgotten it entirely, and would be obliged to take my word for the truth of it, which I could not bear. We drank tea together with Mrs. C——e, and her sister, in King Street, Bloomsbury, and there was the promise made. I said—'Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are.' He smiled, and replied, 'I surely will.'—'These ladies,' said I, 'are witnesses.' He still smiled, and said—'Let them be so, for I will certainly do it.' But alas! twenty-four years have passed since the day of the date thereof; and to mention it now would be to upbraid him with inattention to his plighted troth. Neither do I suppose he could easily serve such a creature as I am, if he would.—Adieu, whom I love entirely, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, Feb. 19, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—Since so it must be, so it shall be. If you will not sleep under the roof of a friend, may you never sleep under the roof of an enemy! An enemy, however, you will not presently find. Mrs. Unwin bids me mention her affectionately, and tell you that she willingly gives up a part, for the sake of the rest, willingly, at least, as far as willingly may consist with some reluctance. I feel my reluctance too. Our design was, that you should have slept in the room that serves me for a study, and its having been occupied by you would have been an additional recommendation of it to me. But all reluctances are superseded by the thought of seeing you; and because we have nothing so much at heart as the wish to see you happy and comfortable, we are desirous therefore to accommodate you to your own mind, and not to ours. Mrs. Unwin has already secured for you an apartment, or rather two, just such as we could wish. The house in which you will find them is within thirty yards of our own, and opposite to it. The whole affair is thus com-

modiously adjusted; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say, and they will all rush into my mind together, till it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter,—sooner or later they will all come out; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our own roof (a circumstance, that, more than anything, reconciles us to that measure), they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation, a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life, we shall meet each other as alive from the dead; and for my own part I can truly say, that I have not a friend in the other world whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure.

I am truly happy, my dear, in having pleased you with what you have seen of my Homer. I wish that all English readers had your unsophisticated, or rather unadulterated taste, and could relish simplicity like you. But I am well aware that in this respect I am under a disadvantage, and that many, especially many ladies, missing many turns and prettinesses of expression that they have admired in Pope, will account my translation in those particulars defective. But I comfort myself with the thought that in reality it is no defect; on the contrary, that the want of all such embellishments as do not belong to the original will be one of its principal merits with persons indeed capable of relishing Homer. He is the best poet that ever lived for many reasons, but for none more than for that majestic plainness that distinguishes him from all others. As an accomplished person moves gracefully without thinking of it, in like manner the dignity of Homer seems to cost him no labour. It was natural to him to say great things, and to say them well, and little ornaments were beneath his notice. If Maty, my dearest Cousin, should return to you my copy with any such strictures as may make it necessary for me to see it again, before it goes to Johnson, in that case you

shall send it to me, otherwise to Johnson immediately; for he writes me word he wishes his friend to go to work upon it as soon as possible. When you come, my dear, we will hang all these critics together, for they have worried me without remorse or conscience: at least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance with his requisitions, but plucked up my courage at last, and in the very last opportunity that I had, recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time I readily confess that the specimen is the better for all this discipline its author has undergone; but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination, to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr. Critic; for as sure as you are my Cousin whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief, if I would have given him leave.

My friend Bagot writes to me in a most friendly strain, and calls loudly upon me for original poetry. When I shall have done with Homer, probably he will not call in vain. Having found the prime feather of a swan on the banks of the *smug and silver Trent*, he keeps it for me.—Adieu, my dear Cousin, W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Olney, Feb. 27, 1786.

Alas! alas! my dear, dear Friend, may God Himself comfort you! I will not be so absurd as to attempt it. By the close of your letter it should seem, that in this hour of great trial He withholds not His consolations from you. I know by experience that they are neither few nor small; and though I feel for you as I never felt for man before, yet do I sincerely rejoice in this, that whereas there is but one true Comforter in the universe, under afflictions such as yours, you both know Him, and know where to seek Him. I thought you a man the most happily mated that I had ever

seen, and had great pleasure in your felicity. Pardon me, if now I feel a wish that, short as my acquaintance with her was, I had never seen her. I should have mourned with you, but not as I do now. Mrs. Unwin sympathizes with you also most sincerely, and you neither are, nor will be soon forgotten in such prayers as we can make at Olney. I will not detain you longer now, my poor afflicted friend, than to commit you to the tender mercy of God, and to bid you a sorrowful adieu !—Adieu ! ever yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Mond. Feb. 27, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—As I sat by the fireside this day after dinner, I saw your chamber windows coated over with snow, so that the glass was hardly visible. This circumstance naturally suggested the thought that it will be otherwise when you come. Then the roses will begin to blow, and perhaps the heat will be as troublesome as the cold is now. The next thought of course was this,—three long months must pass before we shall see her ! I will, however, be as patient as I can, and comfort myself with the thought that we shall meet at last. You said in one of your letters that you had resolved to dream of nobody but of Homer and his translator. I hope you keep your resolution, for I can assure you that the last-mentioned dreams most comfortably of you. About three nights since I dreamed that, sitting in our summer-house, I saw you coming towards me. *With inexpressible pleasure I sprang to meet you, caught you in my arms, and said,—Oh my precious, precious Cousin, may God make me thankful that I see thy face again!* Now, this was a dream, and no dream ;—it was only a shadow while it lasted ; but if we both live, and live to meet, it will be realized hereafter. Yet alas ! the passages and events of the day as well as of the night are little better than dreams. . . . —Yours, most truly, Wm. Cowper.

To Lady Hesketh

March 29, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—Animated by the hope that, if you could be furnished with an abode at Olney, you might possibly make it in some sort the place of your residence, at least in the summer season, Mrs. Unwin and I have talked, thought, and inquired to the very bottom of that subject, and have been constantly occupied in it, ever since the receipt of your dear letter, which contains nothing but what is comfortable, and which contains some encouragement of an expectation that is more comfortable than all the rest. Olney, you are to understand, though much improved since our first acquaintance with it, is rather a poor town, and contains but one house except our own, that is not occupied by a trade, and that one is by no means to be got at. But we are just now come home after having taken an exact survey of such a one as is in many respects the very thing we wish, though not in all. It has what may fairly be called in the country, a very good parlour, and very neatly furnished. Over it is a very good chamber, large and in good order; and in it a *very good bed.* It has also a kitchen, roomy enough, with a good fire-place close to a good sash window, and I believe in all respects commodious. There is also a very pretty garden, that has been famous in Olney these many years, for its neatness and smartness; and therein is a root-house, which will be at your service, and where you may drink tea if you choose it. It is so situated that you may walk into the country in three different directions, without having any part of the town to traverse. The rooms that you will occupy are all well sashed; the parlour window and the chamber window are both Venetian. The people themselves are very honest, sober, elderly folks, and quite respectable. They carry on a trade, but a very neat and silent one; —they are dealers in lace. The house has a modern face, and was rebuilt but a short time before we came

to Olney. For these accommodations they ask twenty pounds a year. All this, my dear, is well, and pleases us at the heart. But now comes a difficulty; servants must be provided for, and how shall we find room for them? Adjoining to your chamber, for so I call it, I hope, prophetically, is a very decent room in which your own maid might repose herself to her wish. But then there is an apprentice in the case who at present has possession of it, for whom, while he stays, there is no other; and of whose departure there is no hope till the end of August. One of the maids might sleep with the maid of the house, if she has no objection to it; but the room that I have just mentioned is the only spare servants'-room that the house affords. It might possibly be easy to find lodging for two servants at no great distance,—perhaps, at the next door, but your own woman should certainly be within call. Thus stands the case, my beloved Cousin. But you will come, and you will see it all with your own eyes, and then we shall be able to remedy any defects better than we can without you. Do like it if you can. I should tell you that the situation is such that you will never be troubled with an afternoon or evening sun. It is within five minutes' walk of our door. There is not in Olney, nor in all the neighbourhood of Olney, a ready-furnished house or lodging to be found besides. As to the rooms once occupied by Lady Austen, they are, alas! out of the question. She furnished them herself, and at present the walls are bare. They are in the vicarage, which at that time was occupied by curate, wife, and family. But that curate has removed to London, and now preaches at the Lock; and the present one is a single man, and has not, I suppose, much more furniture than the Shunamite bestowed upon Elisha when she lodged him on the wall of her house. We have learned, however, on inquiry, that two rooms excepted, the whole is vacant. The house that I have described, as far as parlour, chamber, and kitchen are concerned, is so exactly the thing that I think would suit you, that neither I nor Mrs. Unwin can help

cherishing a hope that some way or other matters may be made to fadge. . . .—Adieu, my ever beloved.

Wm. Cowper.

To Lady Hesketh

April 3, *Mond.* 1786.

. . . I tell you a remarkable coincidence of dates and events: I received your present of wine on my birthday, November 26; the desk on the 7th of December, the day when I left London; and my snuff-box, &c. from Anonymous on the 24th of January, on which day, twelve years ago, I plunged into a melancholy that made me almost an infant. I cannot bear to be so concise as want of room obliged me to be on the other side, respecting the wine. Your kindness in making the inquiry is to me better than the wine itself: this is a literal truth, and you may credit it without the least reserve. I had a little of my own when the hamper came, which is the cause of my present abundance. Once more bless you!

The most evident necessity presents itself for your coming in June. We just now learn that these clever apartments cannot be had. The son is to succeed the apprentice in the second chamber. We have offered a bed in our house during your stay, but it is not accepted. There is a tight little house opposite, which I dare say you may have, that will hold you and suite, but it has a west aspect. Perhaps by open windows and curtains it might be kept cool. Mother and daughter only live in it.

Mrs. Unwin begs me to give her most affectionate respects. If you understood Latin, I could tell you, in an elegant line from Horace, how much we both think of you, and talk of you, and long to see you. Dearest Cousin, adieu!

We have expedients *in petto* for settling you at Olney, some of which will surely succeed, but which we will not discuss till you come, that is to say—in June. This is positively the last postscript.

To Lady Hesketh

Monday, April 10, 1786.

That's my good Cousin! now I love you! now I will think of June as you do, that it is the pleasantest of all months, unless you should happen to be here in November too, and make it equally delightful. Before I shall have finished my letter, Mrs. Unwin will have taken a view of the house concerning which you inquire, and I shall be able to give you a circumstantial account of it. The man who built it is lately dead. He had been a common sailor, and assisted under Wolfe and Amherst at the taking of Quebec. When we came hither he was almost penniless, but climbing by degrees into the lace business, amassed money, and built the house in question. Just before he died, having an enterprizing genius, he put almost his whole substance to hazard in sending a large cargo of lace to America, and the venture failing, he has left his widow in penury and distress. For this reason, I conclude that she will have no objection to letting as much of her house as my Cousin will have occasion for, and have therefore given you this short history of the matter. The bed is the best in the town, and the honest tar's folly was much laughed at, when it was known that he, who had so often swung in a hammock, had given twenty pounds for a bed. But now I begin to hope that he made a wiser bargain than I once thought it. She is no gentlewoman, as you may suppose, but she is nevertheless a very quiet, decent, sober body, and well respected among her neighbours. . . . Had there been a question last year of our meeting at Olney, I should have felt myself particularly interested in this inattention of yours to the figure, for the sake of its contents; for at that time I had rather more body than it became a man who pretends to public approbation as a poet, to carry about him. But, thanks to Dr. Kerr, I do not at present measure an inch more in the girth than is perfectly consistent with the highest pretensions

in that way. Apollo himself is hardly less chargeable with prominence about the waist than I am.

I by no means insist upon making ladies of the Trojan women, unless I can reconcile you to the term. But I must observe in the first place, that though in our language the word be of modern use, it is likewise very ancient. We read in our oldest Bibles of the elect *Lady*, and of Babylon the *Lady* of kingdoms. In the next place, the Grecians, Homer at least, when a woman of rank is accosted, takes care in many instances that she shall be addressed in a style suited to her condition, for which purpose he employs a word more magnificent in its amount than even lady, and which literally signifies very little less than goddess. The word that I mean—that I may make it legible to you, is *Daimonie.* There were, no doubt, in Troy,—but I will say no more of it. I have that to write about to my English lady, that makes all the ladies of antiquity nothing worth to me.

We are at this moment returned from the house above-mentioned. The parlour is small and neat, not a mere cupboard, but very passable: the chamber is better, and quite smart. There is a little room close to your own for Mrs. Eaton, and there is room for Cookee and Samuel. The terms are half a guinea a week; but it seems as if we were never to take a step without a stumble. The kitchen is bad,—it has, indeed, never been used except as a washhouse; for people at Olney do not eat and drink as they do in other places. I do not mean, my dear, that they quaff nectar or feed on ambrosia, but *tout au contraire.* So what must be done about this abominable kitchen? It is out of doors: that is not amiss. It has neither range nor jack: that is terrible. But then range and jack are not unattainables: they may be easily supplied. And if it were not—abominable kitchen that it is, no bigger than half an egg-shell, shift might be made. The good woman is content that your servants should eat and drink in her parlour, but expects that they shall disperse themselves when they have done. But

whither, who can say? unless into the arbour in the garden, for that they should solace themselves in said kitchen were hardly to be expected. While I write this, Mrs. U. is gone to attempt a treaty with the linen-draper over the way, which, if she succeeds, will be best of all, because the rooms are better, and it is just at hand. I must halt till she returns.—She returns; nothing done. She is gone again to another place. Once more I halt. Again she returns and opens the parlour door with these tidings:—'I have succeeded beyond my utmost hopes. I went to Maurice Smith's (he you must know, my dear, is a Jack-of-all-trades); I said, do you know if Mr. Brightman could and would let lodgings ready furnished to a lady with three servants? Maurice's wife calls out (she is a Quaker), "Why dost thee not take the vicarage?" I replied, There is no furniture. "Pshaw!" quoth Maurice's wife; "we will furnish it for thee, and at the lowest rate:—from a bed to a platter we will find all."'—And what do you intend now? said I to Mrs. Unwin. 'Why now,' quoth she, 'I am going to the curate to hear what *he* says.' So away she goes, and in about twenty minutes returns.—'Well, now it is all settled. Lady H. is to have all the vicarage, except two rooms, at the rate of ten guineas a year; and Maurice will furnish it for five guineas from June to November, inclusive.' So, my dear, you and your train are provided for to my heart's content. They are Lady Austen's lodgings, only with more room, and at the same price. You have a parlour sixteen feet by fourteen, chamber ditto; a room for your own maid, near to your own, that I have occupied many a good time; an exceeding good garret for Cookee, and another ditto, at a convenient distance, for Samuel; a cellar, a good kitchen, the use of the garden;—in short, all that you can want. Give us our commission in your next, and all shall be ready by the first of June. You will observe, my beloved Cousin, that it is not in all above eight shillings a week in the whole year, or but a trifle more. And the furniture is really smart, and

the beds good. But you must find your own linen. Come then, my beloved Cousin, for I am determined that, whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be *Vicar* of Olney. Come and cheer my heart. I have left many things unsaid, but shall note them another time. Adieu !—Ever yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, April 17, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—If you will not quote Solomon, my dearest Cousin, I will. He says, and as beautiful as truly—'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!' I feel how much reason he had on his side when he made this observation, and am myself sick of your fortnight's delay.

. . . . . .

The vicarage was built by Lord Dartmouth, and was not finished till some time after we arrived at Olney, consequently it is new. It is a smart stone building, well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden, but rather calculated for use than ornament. It is square, and well walled, but has neither arbour, nor alcove, nor other shade, except the shadow of the house. But we have two gardens, which are yours. Between your mansion and ours is interposed nothing but an orchard, into which a door opening out of our garden affords us the easiest communication imaginable, will save the roundabout by the town, and make both houses one. Your chamber windows look over the river, and over the meadows, to a village called Emberton, and command the whole length of a long bridge, described by a certain poet, together with a view of the road at a distance. Should you wish for books at Olney, you must bring them with you, or you will wish in vain, for I have none but the works of a certain poet, Cowper, of whom perhaps you have heard, and they

are as yet but two volumes. They may multiply hereafter; but at present they are no more.

You are the first person for whom I have heard Mrs. Unwin express such feelings as she does for you. She is not profuse in professions, nor forward to enter into treaties of friendship with new faces; but when her friendship is once engaged, it may be confided in even unto death. She loves you already, and how much more will she love you before this time twelvemonth! I have indeed endeavoured to describe you to her, but perfectly as I have you by heart, I am sensible that my picture cannot do you justice. I never saw one that did. Be you what you may, you are much beloved, and will be so at Olney, and Mrs. U. expects you with the pleasure that one feels at the return of a long absent, dear relation; that is to say, with a pleasure such as mine. She sends you her warmest affections.

On Friday I received a letter from dear Anonymous, apprizing me of a parcel that the coach would bring me on Saturday. Who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions, lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed anything so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy Well then, I will

be content without it; and so content that, though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me, while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort, or to steal the secret from you. I should think myself as justly punishable as the Bethshemites, for looking into the Ark, which they were not allowed to touch.

I have not sent for Kerr, for Kerr can do nothing but send me to Bath, and to Bath I cannot go for a thousand reasons. The summer will set me up again. I grow fat everyday, and shall be as big as Gog or Magog, or both put together, before you come.

I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I, and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, Cousin! how could you do so? I am pleased with Lord Thurlow's inquiries about me. If he takes it into that inimitable head of his, he may make a man of me yet. I could love him heartily, if he would but deserve it at my hands. That I did so once is certain. The Duchess of ——, who in the world set her a-going? But if all the duchesses in the world were spinning, like so many whirligigs, for my benefit, I would not stop them. It is a noble thing to be a poet, it makes all the world so lively. I might have preached more sermons than even Tillotson did, and better, and the world would have been still fast asleep; but a volume of verse is a fiddle that puts the universe in motion.—Yours, my dear Friend and Cousin,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, April 24, 1786.

Your letters are so much my comfort, that I often tremble lest by any accident I should be disappointed; and the more because you have been, more than once, so engaged in company on the writing day, that I have

had a narrow escape. Let me give you a piece of good counsel, my Cousin: follow my laudable example—write when you can; take Time's forelock in one hand, and a pen in the other, and so make sure of your opportunity. It is well for me that you write faster than anybody, and more in an hour than other people in two, else I know not what would become of me. When I read your letters I hear you talk, and I love talking letters dearly, especially from you. Well! the middle of June will not be always a thousand years off, and when it comes I shall hear you, and see you too, and shall not care a farthing then if you do not touch a pen in a month. By the way, you must either send me, or bring me some more paper, for before the moon shall have performed a few more revolutions I shall not have a scrap left,—and tedious revolutions they are just now, that is certain.

I give you leave to be as peremptory as you please, especially at a distance; but when you say that you are a Cowper (and the better it is for the Cowpers that such you are, and I give them joy of you, with all my heart), you must not forget that I boast myself a Cowper too, and have my humours, and fancies, and purposes, and determinations, as well as others of my name, and hold them as fast as they can. *You* indeed tell *me* how often I shall see you when you come! A pretty story truly. I am a *he* Cowper, my dear, and claim the privileges that belong to my noble sex. But these matters shall be settled as my cousin Agamemnon used to say, at a more convenient time. . . .

The grass begins to grow, and the leaves to bud, and everything is preparing to be beautiful against you come. Adieu! W. C.

You inquire of our walks, I perceive, as well as of our rides: they are beautiful. You inquire also concerning a cellar: you have two cellars. Oh! what years have passed since we took the same walks, and drank out of the same bottle! but a few more weeks and then!

To Lady Hesketh

May 1, 1786.

You need not trouble yourself, my dearest Cousin, about paper, my kind and good friend the General having undertaken of his own mere motion to send me all that I ever want, whether for transcript or correspondence. My dear, there is no possible project within the compass of invention, by which you can be released from the necessity of keeping your own nags at Olney, if you keep your carriage here. At the Swan they have no horses, or, which is equally negative in such a case, they have but one. At the Bull, indeed, they keep a chaise; but, not to mention the disagreeable of using one inn and hiring from another, or the extortionate demands that the woman of the Bull ever makes when anything either gentle or noble is so unhappy as to fall into her hands, her steeds are so seldom disengaged, that you would find the disappointments endless. The chaise of course is engaged equally, and the town of Olney affords nothing else into which you could put your person. All these matters taken together, and another reason with them, which I shall presently subjoin,—it appeared to us so indispensable a requisite to your comfort here that you should have your own, both carriage and horses, that we have this day actually engaged accommodation for them at the Swan aforesaid.

Our walks are, as I told you, beautiful, but it is a walk to get at them; and though when you come, I shall take you into training, as the jockeys say, I doubt not that I shall make a nimble and good walker of you in a short time, you would find, as even I do in warm weather, that the preparatory steps are rather too many in number. Weston, which is our pleasantest retreat of all, is a mile off, and there is not in that whole mile to be found so much shade as would cover you. Mrs. Unwin and I have for many years walked thither everyday in the year, when the weather would permit; and to speak like a poet, the limes and the

elms of Weston can witness for us both how often we have sighed and said,—'Oh! that our garden opened into this grove, or into this wilderness! for we are fatigued before we reach them, and when we have reached them, have not time enough to enjoy them.' Thus stands the case, my dear, and the unavoidable *ergo* stares you in the face. Would *I* could do so too just at this moment!—We have three or four other walks, which are all pleasant in their way; but, except one, they all lie at such a distance as you would find heinously incommodious. But Weston, as I said before, is our favourite: of that we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was, indeed, some time since, in a neighbouring parish called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little paradise: but the poplars have been felled, and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses on this melancholy occasion, which, though they have been printed, I dare say you never saw. When you come, therefore, you shall see them; but, as I told you in my last, not before. . . .

On Saturday,—for sooner than Saturday, we could not, on account of the weather,—we paid our visit at Weston, and a very agreeable visit we found it. We encountered there, besides the family, four ladies, all strange to us. One of them was a Miss Bagot, a sister of my friend Walter's; and another of them was a Mrs. Chester, his sister-in-law. Mr. Chester, his brother, lives at Chicheley, about four miles from Olney. Poor Mrs. Bagot was remembered with tears by Mrs. Chester: she is by everybody's account of her a most amiable woman. Such also, I dare say, is Miss Bagot; but the room in which we were received was large, and she sitting at the side of it, exactly opposite

to me, I had neither lungs nor courage to halloo at her; therefore nothing passed between us. I chatted a good deal with my neighbours; but you know, my dear, I am not famous for vociferation where there are ears not much accustomed to my voice. Nothing can be more obliging than the behaviour of the Throckmortons has ever been to us; they long since gave us the keys of all their retreats, even of their kitchen-garden. And that you may not suspect your cousin of being any other than a very obliging creature too, I will give you a stroke of his politesse. When they were here they desired to see the garden and greenhouse. I am proud of neither, except in poetry, because there I can fib without lying, and represent them better than they are. However, I conducted them to the sight, and having set each of the ladies with her head in a bush of myrtle, I took out my scissors and cut a bouquet for each of them. When we were with *them* Mrs. Throckmorton told me that she had put all the slips into water, for she should be so glad to make them grow, and asked me if they would strike root. I replied, that I had known such things happen, but believed that they were very rare, and recommended a hot-bed rather, and she immediately resolved that they should have one. Now comes the period at which your cousin shines. In the evening I ordered my labourer to trundle up a wheelbarrow of myrtles and canary lavender (a most fragrant plant), to Weston, with which I sent a note to Mrs. Throckmorton, recommending them to her protection. *Dites moi, ma chère, ne suis-je homme tout à fait poli?*

Weston, as I told you, is about a mile off, but in truth it is rather more. Gayhurst is five miles off: I have walked there, but I never walked thither. I have not these many years been such an extravagant tramper as I once was. I did myself no good I believe by pilgrimages of such immoderate length. The Chesters, the Throckmortons, the Wrights, are all of them good-natured agreeable people, and I rejoice, for your sake, that they lie all within your beat. Of the

rest of our neighbours I know nothing. They are not, indeed, many. A Mr. Praed lives at a seat called Tyringham, which is also about five miles hence; but him I never saw, save once, when I saw him jump over a rail at Weston. There is a Mr. Towers at a place called Astwoodberry, about seven miles off; but he is a foxhunter merely: and Lord Egmont dwelt in a hired house at a place called Woolaston, at the same distance; but he hired it merely by way of kennel to hold him during the hunting season, and by this time, I suppose, has left it.

The copper is going to work for you again. Fifty gallons of good beer, added to seventy, will serve to moisten your maidens' lips, and the throats of your lacqueys, and your coachee's, till the season for brewing returns, for it does not succeed in warm weather.

Mrs. Unwin sends you her affections; and the words that follow I take from her mouth as she delivers them: 'Tell Lady Hesketh that I have the sincerest complacency in the expectation of her; and in observing how all things concur and coincide that can bid fair to make her stay at Olney agreeable, insomuch that she seems only to wave her pen and the thing she wants springs up in an instant.' May Heaven bless you, my ever dear, dear Cousin. Farewell.—Yours,

Wm. Cowper.

. . . I have a fine passion-tree in a green tub, that I destine to your parlour chimney: it will be full of flowers.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, May 8, 1786.

. . . One evening last week Mrs. Unwin and I took our walk to Weston, and as we were returning through the grove opposite to the house, the Throckmortons presented themselves at the door. They are owners of a house at Weston, at present empty. It is a very good one, infinitely superior to ours. When we drank chocolate with them, they both expressed their ardent desire that we would take it, wishing to have us for

nearer neighbours. If you, my Cousin, were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered up all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it for ever without danger of ejectment; whereas your possession of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar, who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slipper even in winter. A most unfortunate mistake was made by that gentleman's bailiff in his absence. Just before he left Weston last year for the winter, he gave him orders to cut short the tops of the flowering shrubs that lined a serpentine walk in a delightful grove, celebrated by my poetship in a little piece that you remember was called *The Shrubbery*. The dunce, misapprehending the order, cut down and faggoted up the whole grove, leaving neither tree, bush, nor twig,—nothing but stumps about as high as my ankle. Mrs. Throckmorton told us that she never saw her husband so angry in her life. I judge indeed by his physiognomy, which has great sweetness in it, that he is very little addicted to that infernal passion. But had he cudgelled the man for his cruel blunder, and the havoc made in consequence of it, I could have excused him. . . . May God be ever with you, my beloved Cousin! W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Olney, May 20, 1786.

My dear Friend— . . . Now I will talk a little about myself: for except myself, living in this *terrarum angulo*, what can I have to talk about? In a scene of perfect tranquillity, and the profoundest silence, I am kicking up the dust of heroic narrative, and besieging Troy again. I told you that I had almost finished the translation of the *Iliad*, and I verily thought so;—but I was never more mistaken. By the time when I had reached

the end of the poem, the first book of my version was a twelvemonth old. When I came to consider it, after having laid it by so long, it did not satisfy me. I set myself to mend it, and I did so. But still it appeared to me improvable, and that nothing would so effectually secure that point as to give the whole book a new translation. With the exception of very few lines I have so done, and was never in my life so convinced of the soundness of Horace's advice to publish nothing in haste; so much advantage have I derived from doing that twice which I thought I had accomplished notably at once. He indeed recommends nine years' imprisonment of your verses before you send them abroad: but the ninth part of that time is I believe as much as there is need of to open a man's eyes upon his own defects, and to secure him from the danger of premature self-approbation. Neither ought it to be forgotten that nine years make so wide an interval between the cup and the lip, that a thousand things may fall out between. New engagements may occur, which may make the finishing of that which a poet has begun impossible. In nine years he may rise into a situation, or he may sink into one utterly incompatible with his purpose. His constitution may break in nine years, and sickness may disqualify him for improving what he enterprised in the days of health. His inclination may change, and he may find some other employment more agreeable, or another poet may enter upon the same work, and get the start of him. Therefore, my friend Horace, though I acknowledge your principle to be good, I must confess that I think the practice you would ground upon it carried to an extreme. The rigour that I exercised upon the first book, I intend to exercise upon all that follow, and have now actually advanced into the middle of the seventh, nowhere admitting more than one line in fifty of the first translation. You must not imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth I had not; but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to,

both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed if it does not call aloud for a second. You saw the specimen, and you saw, I am sure, one great fault in it: I mean the harshness of some of the elisions. I do not altogether take the blame of these to myself, for into some of them I was actually driven and haunted by a series of reiterated objections made by a critical friend, whose scruples and delicacies teased me out of all my patience. But no such monsters will be found in the volume. . . .—Ever yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, May 29, 1786.

Thou dear, comfortable Cousin, whose letters, among all that I receive, have this property peculiarly their own, that I expect them without trembling, and never find anything in them that does not give me pleasure; for which therefore I would take nothing in exchange that the world could give me, save and except that for which I must exchange them soon (and happy shall I be to do so), your own company. That, indeed, is delayed a little too long; to my impatience at least it seems so, who find the spring, backward as it is, too forward, because many of its beauties will have faded before you will have an opportunity to see them. We took our customary walk yesterday in the wilderness at Weston, and saw, with regret, the laburnums, syringas, and guelder-roses, some of them blown, and others just upon the point of blowing, and could not help observing—all these will be gone before Lady Hesketh comes! Still however there will be roses, and jasmine, and honeysuckle, and shady walks, and cool alcoves, and you will partake them with us. But I want you to have a share of everything that is delightful here, and cannot bear that the advance of the season should steal away a single pleasure before you can come to enjoy it.

Everyday I think of you, and almost all the day

long; I will venture to say, that even *you* were never so expected in your life. I called last week at the Quaker's to see the furniture of your bed, the fame of which had reached me. It is, I assure you, superb, of printed cotton, and the subject classical. Every morning you will open your eyes on Phaeton kneeling to Apollo, and imploring his father to grant him the conduct of his chariot for a day. May your sleep be as sound as your bed will be sumptuous, and your nights at least will be well provided for. . . . W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Olney, June 4 and 5, 1786.

Ah! my Cousin, you begin already to fear and quake. What a hero am I, compared with you! I have no fears of *you*; on the contrary am as bold as a lion. I wish that your carriage were even now at the door. You should soon see with how much courage I would face you. But what cause have you for fear? Am I not your cousin, with whom you have wandered in the fields of Freemantle, and at Bevis's Mount? who used to read to you, laugh with you, till our sides have ached, at anything, or nothing? And am I in these respects at all altered? You will not find me so; but just as ready to laugh, and to wander, as you ever knew me. A cloud perhaps may come over me now and then, for a few hours, but from clouds I was never exempted. And are not you the identical Cousin with whom I have performed all these feats? The very Harriet whom I saw, for the first time, at De Grey's in Norfolk Street? (It was on a Sunday, when you came with my uncle and aunt to drink tea there, and I had dined there, and was just going back to Westminster.) If these things are so, and I am sure that you cannot gainsay a syllable of them all, then this consequence follows; and I do not promise myself more pleasure from your company than I shall be sure to find. Then you are my Cousin, in whom I always delighted, and in whom I doubt not that I shall delight even to my

latest hour. But this wicked coach-maker has sunk my spirits. What a miserable thing it is to depend, in any degree, for the accomplishment of a wish, and that wish so fervent, on the punctuality of a creature who I suppose was never punctual in his life! Do tell him, my dear, in order to quicken him, that if he performs his promise, he shall make my coach when I want one, and that if he performs it not, I will most assuredly employ some other man.

The Throckmortons sent a note to invite us to dinner; we went, and a very agreeable day we had. They made no fuss with us, which I was heartily glad to see, for where I give trouble I am sure that I cannot be welcome. Themselves, and their chaplain, and we, were all the party. After dinner we had much cheerful and pleasant talk, the particulars of which might not perhaps be so entertaining upon paper, therefore all but one I will omit, and that I will mention only because it will of itself be sufficient to give you an insight into their opinion on a very important subject,—their own religion. I happened to say that in all professions and trades mankind affected an air of mystery. Physicians, I observed, in particular, were objects of that remark, who persist in prescribing in Latin, many times no doubt to the hazard of a patient's life, through the ignorance of an apothecary. Mr. Throckmorton assented to what I said, and turning to his chaplain, to my infinite surprise observed to him, '*That is just as absurd as our praying in Latin.*' I could have hugged him for his liberality, and freedom from bigotry, but thought it rather more decent to let the matter pass without any visible notice. I therefore heard it with pleasure, and kept my pleasure to myself. The two ladies in the meantime were tête-à-tête in the drawing-room. Their conversation turned principally (as I afterwards learned from Mrs. Unwin) on a most delightful topic, viz. myself. In the first place, Mrs. Throckmorton admired my book, from which she quoted by heart more than I could repeat, though I so lately wrote it. . . .

My dearest Cousin, adieu! I hope to write to you but once more before we meet. But oh! this coach-maker, and oh! this holiday week!—Yours, with impatient desire to see you, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Olney, June 9, 1786.

My dear Friend— . . . The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer,—

To whom replied the Devil yard-long-tailed.

There never was anything more truly Grecian than that triple epithet, and were it possible to introduce it into either *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, I should certainly steal it. I am now flushed with expectation of Lady Hesketh, who spends the summer with us. We hope to see her next week. We have found admirable lodgings both for her and her suite, and a Quaker in this town, still more admirable than they, who, as if he loved her as much as I do, furnishes them for her with real elegance.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

June 12, 1786.

I am neither young nor superannuated, yet am I child. When I had read your letter I grumbled: not at you, my dearest Cousin, for you are in no fault, but at the whole generation of coach-makers, as you may suppose, and at yours in particular. I foresaw and foreknew that he would fail in his promise, and yet was disappointed; was, in truth, no more prepared for what I expected with so much reason, than if I had not at all expected it. I grumbled till we went to dinner, and at intervals till we had dined; and when dinner was over, with very little encouragement, I could actually have cried. And if I had, I should in truth have thought them tears as well bestowed as most that I have shed

for many years. At first I numbered months, then weeks, then days, and was just beginning to number hours, and now I am thrown back to days again. My first speech was, after folding up your letter (for I will honestly tell you all), I am crazed with Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays and St. Albans, and Totteridge, and Hadley. When is she to set out?—When is she to be here? Do tell me, for, perhaps, you understand it better than I! Why, says Mrs. Unwin (with much more composure in her air than properly belonged to her, for she also had her feelings on the occasion), she sets out to-morrow se'nnight, and will be here on the Wednesday after. And who knows that? replied I; will the coach-maker be at all more punctual in repairing the old carriage, than in making the new one? For my part, I have no hope of seeing her this month; and if it be possible, I will not think of it, lest I should be again disappointed. And to say the truth, my dear, though hours have passed since thus I said, and I have had time for cooler consideration, the suspicion still sticks to me, that more delays may happen. A philosopher would prepare himself for such an event, but I am no philosopher, at least when the comfort of seeing you is in question. I believe in my heart that there have been just as many true philosophers upon earth, as there have been men that have had little or no feeling, and not one more. Swift truly says—

> Indifference clad in reason's guise,
> All want of fortitude supplies.

When I wake in the night, I feel my spirits the lighter because you are coming. When I am not at Troy, I am either occupied in the recollection of a thousand passages of my past life, in which you were a partaker with me, or conversing about you with Mrs. Unwin. . . .

I approve altogether, my Cousin beloved, of your sending your goods to the wagon on Saturday, and Cookee by the coach on Tuesday. She will be here perhaps by four in the afternoon, at the latest by five,

and will have quite time enough to find out all the cupboards and shelves in her department before you arrive. But I declare and protest that Cookee shall sleep that night at our house, and get her breakfast here next morning. You will break her heart, child, if you send her into a strange house where she will find nothing that has life but the curate, who has not much neither. Servant he keeps none. A woman makes his bed, and after a fashion as they say, dresses his dinner, and then leaves him to his lucubrations. I do therefore insist on it, and so does Mrs. Unwin, that Cookee shall be our guest for that time; and from this we will not depart. I tell thee besides, that I shall be more glad to see her, than ever I was in my life to see one whom I never saw before. Guess why, if you can.

You must number your miles fifty-six instead of fifty-four. The fifty-sixth mile ends but a few yards beyond the vicarage. Soon after you shall have entered Olney, you will find an opening on your right hand. It is a lane that leads to your dwelling. There your coach may stop and set down Mrs. Eaton; when she has walked about forty yards she will spy a green gate and rails on her left hand; and when she has opened the gate and reached the house-door, she will find herself at home. But we have another manœuvre to play off upon you, and in which we positively will not be opposed, or if we are, it shall be to no purpose. I have an honest fellow that works in my garden, his name is Kitchener, and we call him Kitch for brevity. He is sober, and as trusty as the day. He has a smart blue coat, that when I had worn it some years, I gave him, and he has now worn it some years himself. I shall set him on horseback, and order him to the Swan at Newport, there to wait your arrival, and if you should not stop at that place, as perhaps you may not, immediately to throw himself into your suite, and to officiate as your guide. For though the way from Newport hither is short, there are turnings that might puzzle your coachman; and he will be of use

too, in conducting you to our house, which otherwise you might not easily find, partly through the stupidity of those of whom you might inquire, and partly from its out-of-the-way situation. My brother drove up and down Olney in quest of us, almost as often as you, up and down Chancery Lane in quest of the Madans, with fifty boys and girls at his tail, before he could find us. The first man, therefore, you shall see in a blue coat with white buttons, in the famous town of Newport, cry Kitch! He will immediately answer, My Lady! and from that moment you are sure not to be lost.

Your house shall be as clean as scrubbing and dry-rubbing can make it, and in all respects fit to receive you. My friend the Quaker, in all that I have seen of his doings, has acquitted himself much to my satisfaction. Some little things, he says, will perhaps be missing at first, in such a multiplicity, but they shall be produced as soon as called for. Mrs. U. has bought you six ducks, and is fatting them for you. She has also rummaged up a coop that will hold six chickens, and designs to people it for you by the first opportunity; for these things are not to be got fit for the table at Olney. Thus, my dear, are all things in the best train possible, and nothing remains but that you come and show yourself. Oh, that moment! Shall we not both enjoy it?—That we shall.

I have received an anonymous complimentary Pindaric Ode from a little poet who calls himself a schoolboy. I send you the first stanza by way of specimen. You shall see it all soon.

TO WM. COWPER, OF THE INNER TEMPLE, ESQ.

ON HIS POEMS IN THE SECOND VOLUME.

In what high strains, my Muse, wilt thou
Attempt great Cowper's worth to show?
Pindaric strains that tune the lyre,
And 'twould require
A Pindar's fire
To sing great Cowper's worth,
The lofty bard, delightful sage,
Ever the wonder of the age,
And *blessing to the earth.*

Adieu, my precious Cousin, your lofty bard and delightful sage expects you with all possible affection. —Ever yours, WM. COWPER.

Our dinner hour is four o'clock. We will not surfeit you with delicacies; of that be assured. I know your palate, and am glad to know that it is easily pleased. Were it other than it is, it would stand but a poor chance to be gratified at Olney. I undertake for lettuce and cucumber, and Mrs. U. for all the rest. If she feeds you too well, you must humble her.

To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, June 19, 1785.

My dear Cousin's arrival has, as it could not fail to do, made us happier than we ever were at Olney. Her great kindness in giving us her company is a cordial that I shall feel the effect of, not only while she is here, but while I live.

Olney will not be much longer the place of our habitation. At a village two miles distant we have hired a house of Mr. Throckmorton, a much better than we occupy at present, and yet not more expensive. It is situated very near to our most agreeable landlord, and his agreeable pleasure grounds. In him, and in his wife, we shall find such companions as will always make the time pass pleasantly while they are in the country, and his grounds will afford us good air, and good walking room in the winter; two advantages which we have not enjoyed at Olney, where I have no neighbour with whom I can converse, and where, seven months in the year, I have been imprisoned by dirty and impassable ways, till both my health and Mrs. Unwin's have suffered materially.

Homer is ever importunate, and will not suffer me to spend half the time with my distant friends that I would gladly give them. W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Olney, July 3, 1786.

My dear William—After a long silence I begin again. A day given to my friends, is a day taken from Homer, but to such an interruption now and then occurring, I have no objection. Lady Hesketh is, as you observe, arrived, and has been with us near a fortnight. She pleases everybody, and is pleased in her turn with everything she finds at Olney; is always cheerful and sweet-tempered, and knows no pleasure equal to that of communicating pleasure to us, and to all around her. This disposition in her is the more comfortable, because it is not the humour of the day, a sudden flash of benevolence and good spirits, occasioned merely by a change of scene; but it is her natural turn, and has governed all her conduct ever since I knew her first. We are consequently happy in her society, and shall be happier still to have you to partake with us in our joy. I can now assure you that her complexion is not at all indebted to art, having seen a hundred times the most convincing proof of its authenticity, her colour fading, and glowing again alternately as the weather, or her own temperature has happened to affect it, while she has been sitting before me. I am fond of the sound of bells, but was never more pleased with those of Olney than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage (Lord Dartmouth excepted) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted with everything that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me; my spirits, instead of being greatly raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat, or rather melancholy throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made

amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years.

And now I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode, you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother dwelt in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purpose of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand. The bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my Cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to contain us, and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will I hope prove advantageous both to your mother and me in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to

retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. A pretty deal of new furniture will be wanted, especially chairs and beds, all which my kind Cousin will provide, and fit up a parlour and a chamber for herself into the bargain. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven.

I have hardly left myself room for an answer to your queries concerning my friend John, and his studies. What the supplement of Hirtius is made of, I know not. We did not read it at Westminster. I should imagine it might be dispensed with. I should recommend the civil war of Caesar, because he wrote it, who ranks I believe as the best writer, as well as soldier, of his day. There are books (I know not what they are, but you do, and can easily find them) that will inform him clearly of both the civil and military management of the Romans, the several officers, I mean, in both departments; and what was the peculiar province of each. The study of some such book would I should think prove a good introduction to that of Livy, unless you have a Livy with notes to that effect. A want of intelligence in those points has heretofore made the Roman history very dark and difficult to me; therefore I thus advise.

Our love is with all your lovelies, both great and small.—Yours ever, W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Aug. 9, 1786.

My dear William— . . . I hope that you have by this time completely recovered from the indisposition occasioned by your journey. The day after your departure, Lady Hesketh said, Now we want Mr. Unwin. Her reason, at least one of her reasons, for saying so was that we had spent near half an hour together without laughing:—an interval of gravity that does not often occur where you are present.

She has not yet heard from Mr. Hornby. If a letter should arrive by this day's post, I will insert notice

of it before I close mine. We infer from his silence that he had not previously engaged himself before the receipt of hers. He has, I suppose, like most men of large fortune, who see much company, a *cacoethes* not of *scribendi* but of *non scribendi*. . . .

Adieu, my dear William, Pandarus and Diomede are on fire to combat, breakfast is ready, and the moment I have swallowed it, I must commit them in terrible conflict. . . .—Ever yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

August 24, 1786.

My dear Friend—I catch a minute by the tail and hold it fast, while I write to you. The moment it is fled I must go to breakfast. The post that brought me your speculations on the subject of your future pupil, conveyed to you I suppose Lady Hesketh's letter on the same subject, which has no doubt given you satisfaction. I saw Mr. Hornby's letter, than which nothing could be more handsome. His sole remark on the matter of stipend is this,—that in placing the young gentleman under the influence of such excellent tuition, he confers on him a greater advantage than he could secure to him by any other means. You see, therefore, that he is a wise man, knows how to value the opportunity, and that erudition, &c. are better than house and land ; for that

> When house and land are gone and spent,
> Then larning is most excellent.

I wish you all possible success with him, and that the Muses nine, with Apollo at their head, may brighten his intellects, and make him readily susceptible of all that you shall endeavour to infuse.

I am still occupied in refining and polishing, and shall this morning give the finishing hand to the seventh book. Fuseli does me the honour to say that the most difficult, and most interesting parts of the poem, are admirably rendered. But because he did

not express himself equally pleased with the more pedestrian parts of it, my labour therefore has been principally given to the dignification of them; not but that I have retouched considerably, and made better still the best. In short I hope to make it all of a piece, and shall exert myself to the utmost to secure that desirable point. A story-teller so very circumstantial as Homer, must of necessity present us often with much matter in itself capable of no other embellishment than purity of diction and harmony of versification can give to it. *Hic labor, hoc opus est.* For our language, unless it be very severely chastised, has not the terseness, nor our measure the music of the Greek. But I shall not fail through want of industry.

We are likely to be very happy in our connexion with the Throckmortons. His reserve and mine wear off, and he talks with great pleasure of the comfort that he proposes to himself from our winter-evening conversations. His purpose seems to be, that we should spend them alternately with each other. Lady Hesketh transcribes for me at present. When she is gone, Mrs. Throckmorton takes up that business, and will be my lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter. She solicited herself that office.

I will subjoin the measure of my hat. Let the new one be furnished *à la mode.*

Believe me, my dear William, truly yours, W. C.

. . . . The outside circumference of the hat crown is two feet one inch and an eighth.

To the Rev. William Unwin

[*No date.*]

My dear Friend—You are my mahogany box, with a slip in the lid of it, to which I commit my productions of the lyric kind, in perfect confidence that they are safe and will go no farther. All who are attached to the jingling art have this peculiarity, that they would find no pleasure in the exercise, had they not one friend at least to whom they might publish what

they have composed. If you approve my Latin, and your wife and sister my English, this, together with the approbation of your mother, is fame enough for me.

He who cannot look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle, I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a schoolboy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally unacquainted with its contrary. No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do. I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes, as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties which, though they never existed, are more captivating than any that ever did ; accordingly I was a schoolboy in high favour with my master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form, for the admiration of all who were able to understand it. Do you wish to see this highly applauded performance? It follows on the other side. [*Torn off.*]

To the Rev. William Unwin

[*No date.*]

My dear William—You are sometimes indebted to bad weather, but more frequently to a dejected state of mind, for my punctuality as a correspondent. This was the case when I composed that tragi-comical ditty[1] for which you thank me: my spirits were exceedingly low, and having no fool or jester at hand, I resolved to be my own. The end was answered ; I laughed myself, and I made you laugh. Sometimes I pour out my thoughts in a mournful strain ; but these sable effusions your mother will not suffer me to send you, being resolved that nobody shall share with me the

[1] Poem not known.

burthen of my melancholy but herself. In general you may suppose that I am remarkably sad when I seem remarkably merry. The effort we make to get rid of a load is usually violent in proportion to the weight of it. I have seen at Sadler's Wells a tight little fellow dancing with a fat man upon his shoulders; to those who looked at him, he seemed insensible of the encumbrance; but if a physician had felt his pulse, when the feat was over, I suppose he would have found the effect of it there. Perhaps you remember the Undertakers' dance in the *Rehearsal*, which they perform in crape hat-bands and black cloaks, to the tune of 'Hob or Nob,' one of the sprightliest airs in the world. Such is my fiddling, and such is my dancing; but they serve a purpose which at some certain times could not be so effectually promoted by anything else. . . .

I have endeavoured to comply with your request, though I am not good at writing upon a given subject. Your mother, however, comforts me by her approbation, and I steer myself in all that I produce by her judgement. If she does not understand me at the first reading, I am sure the lines are obscure, and always alter them; if she laughs, I know it is not without reason; and if she says, 'That's well, it will do'—I have no fear lest anybody else should find fault with it. She is my lord chamberlain, who licenses all I write. . . .

If you like it,[1] use it: if not, you know the remedy. It is serious, yet epigrammatic,—like a bishop at a ball! W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

[*No date.*]

My dear Friend—I write under the impression of a difficulty not easily surmounted, the want of something to say. Letter-spinning is generally more entertaining to the writer than the reader: for your sake, therefore, I would avoid it, but a dearth of materials is very apt to betray one into a trifling strain, in spite of all one's endeavours to be serious.

[1] Lines to Miss C—— on her birthday.

What have you done with your perverse parishioner? Perhaps when he has put a lock upon his pew, he may shut himself up in it oftener than he used to do: you remember a certain story about the boy and his trunk. The consciousness that the seat is become his own so emphatically that he can exclude everybody else, may make him fond of it. I believe many a man that keeps a carriage, rides in it because he keeps one, though sometimes he would otherwise prefer a walk.

I lay by my paper for the present;—I really can go on no farther.

I left off on Saturday, this present being Monday morning, and I renew the attempt, in hopes that I may possibly catch some subject by the end, and be more successful.

> So have I seen the maids in vain
> Tumble and tease a tangled skein:
> They bite the lip, they scratch the head,
> And cry—'The deuce is in the thread!'
> They torture it, and jerk it round,
> Till the right end at last is found;
> Then wind, and wind, and wind away,
> And what was work is changed to play.

When I wrote the two first lines, I thought I had engaged in a hazardous enterprise; for, thought I, should my poetical vein be as dry as my prosaic, I shall spoil the sheet, and send nothing at all; for I could on no account endure the thought of beginning again. But I think I have succeeded to admiration, and am willing to flatter myself that I have seen even a worse impromptu in the newspapers.

Though we live in a nook, and the world is quite unconscious that there are any such beings in it as ourselves, yet we are not unconcerned about what passes in it. The present awful crisis, big with the fate of England, engages much of our attention. The action is probably over by this time, and though we know it not, the grand question is decided, whether the war shall roar in our own once peaceful fields, or whether we shall still only hear of it at a distance. I can compare the nation to no similitude more apt than

that of an ancient castle that had been for days assaulted by the battering-ram. It was long before the stroke of that engine made any sensible impression ; but the continual repetition at length communicated a slight tremor to the wall ; the next, and the next, and the next blow increased it. Another shock puts the whole mass in motion, from the top to the foundation : it bends forward, and is every moment driven farther from the perpendicular ; till at last the decisive blow is given, and down it comes. Every million that has been raised within the last century, has had an effect upon the constitution like that of a blow from the aforesaid ram upon the aforesaid wall. The impulse becomes more and more important, and the impression it makes is continually augmented ; unless, therefore, something extraordinary intervenes to prevent it, you will find the consequence at the end of my simile.—Yours,

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

[*No date.*]

My dear William— . . . I am obliged to you for all the books you have occasionally furnished me with : I did not indeed read many of Johnson's Classics ; those of established reputation are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again : and as to the minor Classics, I did not think them worth reading at all ; I tasted most of them, and did not like them. It is a great thing to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century. Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved the name of poet : I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first. The pitiful scribbler of his life seems to have undertaken that task, for which he was entirely unqualified, merely because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him. He has inserted in it but one anecdote of consequence, for which he refers you to a

novel, and introduces the story with doubts about the truth of it. But his barrenness as a biographer I could forgive, if the simpleton had not thought himself a judge of his writings, and under the erroneous influence of that thought, informed his reader that *Gotham*, *Independence*, and *The Times* were catchpennies. *Gotham*, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which I make no doubt the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance (and Dryden in his *Absalom and Achitophel* stands in need of the same indulgence) for an unwarrantable use of Scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance. *Independence* is a most animated piece, full of strength and spirit, and marked with that bold masculine character which, I think, is the great peculiarity of this writer. And *The Times*, (except that the subject is disgusting to the last degree) stands equally high in my opinion. He is indeed a careless writer for the most part; but where shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ventured upon and so happily finished, the matter so compressed and yet so clear, and the colouring so sparingly laid on, and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise that he is never guilty of those faults as a writer which he lays to the charge of others. A proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics, but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much, and so fast, would through inadvertency and hurry unavoidably have departed from rules which he might have found in books, but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err. A race-horse is graceful in his swiftest pace, and never makes an awkward motion though he is pushed to his utmost speed. A cart-horse might perhaps be taught to play tricks in

the riding-school, and might prance and curvet like his betters, but at some unlucky time would be sure to betray the baseness of his original. It is an affair of very little consequence perhaps to the well-being of mankind, but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph :

> Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
> Esse sinent.

Yours, W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Olney, Aug. 31, 1786.

My dear Friend— . . . The unacquaintedness of modern ears with the divine harmony of Milton's numbers, and the principles upon which he constructed them, is the cause of the quarrel that they have with elisions in blank verse. But where is the remedy? In vain should you or I, and a few hundreds more perhaps who have studied his versification, tell them of the superior majesty of it, and that for that majesty it is greatly indebted to those elisions. In their ears, they are discord and dissonance; they lengthen the line beyond its due limits, and are therefore not to be endured. There is a whimsical inconsistency in the judgement of modern readers in this particular. Ask them all round, whom do you account the best writer of blank verse? and they will reply to a man, Milton, to be sure; Milton against the field! Yet if a writer of the present day should construct his numbers exactly upon Milton's plan, not one in fifty of these professed admirers of Milton would endure him. The case standing thus, what is to be done? An author must either be contented to give disgust to the generality, or he must humour them by sinning against his own judgement. This latter course, so far as elisions are concerned, I have adopted as essential to my success. In every other respect I give as much variety in my measure as I can, I believe I may say as in ten

syllables it is possible to give, shifting perpetually the pause and cadence, and accounting myself happy that modern refinement has not yet enacted laws against this also. If it had, I protest to you I would have dropped my design of translating Homer entirely; and with what an indignant stateliness of reluctance I make them the concession that I have mentioned, Mrs. Unwin can witness, who hears all my complaints upon the subject.

After having lived twenty years at Olney, we are on the point of leaving it, but shall not migrate far. We have taken a house in the village of Weston. Lady Hesketh is our good angel, by whose aid we are enabled to pass into a better air, and a more walkable country. The imprisonment that we have suffered here for so many winters has hurt us both. That we may suffer it no longer, she stoops to Olney, lifts us from our swamp, and sets us down on the elevated grounds of Weston Underwood. There, my dear friend, I shall be happy to see you, and to thank you in person for all your kindness.

I do not wonder at the judgement that you form of Fuseli, a foreigner; but you may assure yourself that, foreigner as he is, he has an exquisite taste in English verse. The man is all fire, and an enthusiast in the highest degree on the subject of Homer, and has given me more than once a jog, when I have been inclined to nap with my author. No cold water is to be feared from him that might abate my own fire, rather perhaps too much combustible.—Adieu, *mon ami*, yours faithfully,

W. C.

To the Rev. William Unwin

Olney, Sept. 24, 1786.

My dear William— . . . You have had your troubles, and we ours. This day three weeks your mother received a letter from Mr. Newton, which she has not yet answered, nor is likely to answer hereafter. It gave us both much concern, but her more than me; I suppose because my mind being necessarily occupied in my work, I had not so much leisure to browse upon

the wormwood that it contained. The purport of it is a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the Gospel. That many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that he never so much doubted of my restoration to Christian privileges as now;—in short, that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so. He concludes with putting your mother in mind that there is still an intercourse between London and Olney; by which he means to insinuate that we cannot offend against the decorum that we are bound to observe, but the news of it will most certainly be conveyed to him. We do not at all doubt it;—we never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer; and though we do not wonder to find ourselves made the subjects of a false accusation in a place ever fruitful of such productions, we do and must wonder a little, that he should listen to them with so much credulity. I say this, because if he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I think, have found either me censurable or your mother. And that *she* should be suspected of irregularities is the more wonderful (for wonderful it would be at any rate), because she sent him not long before a letter conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality as ought to have convinced him that she at least was no wanderer. But what is the fact, and how do we spend our [time] in reality? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them. That we visit also at Gayhurst; that we have frequently taken airings with my cousin in her carriage; and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening and sometimes by myself, which however your mother has never done. These are the only novelties

in our practice; and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found anywhere. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick;—except indeed that, by her great kindness, she has given us a little lift in point of condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

My dear William, I do not know that I should have teased your nerves and spirits with this disagreeable theme, had not Mr. Newton talked of applying to you for particulars. He would have done it, he says, when he saw you last, but had not time. You are now qualified to inform him as minutely as we ourselves could of all our enormities! Adieu!—Our sincerest love to yourself and yours, Wm. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Sept. 30, 1786.

My dear Friend—No length of separation will ever make us indifferent either to your pleasures or your pains. We rejoice that you have had so agreeable a jaunt, and (excepting Mrs. Newton's terrible fall, from which, however, we are happy to find that she received so little injury) a safe return. We, who live always encompassed by rural scenery, can afford to be stationary; though we ourselves, were I not too closely engaged with Homer, should perhaps follow your example, and seek a little refreshment from variety and change of place,—a course that we might find not only agreeable, but, after a sameness of thirteen years, perhaps

useful. You must, undoubtedly, have found your excursion beneficial, who at all other times endure, if not so close a confinement as we, yet a more unhealthy one, in city air and in the centre of continual engagements.

Your letter to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct and the offence taken at it in our neighbourhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; and she is still deeply affected by it. Of this you may assure yourself, that if our friends in London have been grieved, they have been misinformed; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports; and that if any of our serious neighbours have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behaviour of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which in fact it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's and at Gayhurst; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance: more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Beaujeat turnpike and back again; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

> The very head and front of my offending
> Hath this extent, no more.

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question,—which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connexions; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish

abstinence from them ; and that St. Paul himself, conducted to them as we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done. It is always impossible to conjecture, to much purpose, from the beginnings of a providence, in what it will terminate. If we have neither received nor communicated any spiritual good at present, while conversant with our new acquaintance, at least no harm has befallen on either side ; and it were too hazardous an assertion even for our censorious neighbours to make, that, because the cause of the Gospel does not appear to have been served at present, therefore it never can be in any future intercourse that we may have with them. In the meantime I speak a strict truth, and as in the sight of God, when I say that we are neither of us at all more addicted to gadding than heretofore. We both naturally love seclusion from company, and never go into it without putting a force upon our disposition ; at the same time I will confess, and you will easily conceive, that the melancholy incident to such close confinement as we have so long endured, finds itself a little relieved by such amusements as a society so innocent affords. You may look round the Christian world, and find few, I believe, of our station, who have so little intercourse as we with the world that is not Christian.

We place all the uneasiness that you have felt for us upon this subject, to the account of that cordial friendship of which you have long given us proof. But you may be assured, that notwithstanding all rumours to the contrary, we are exactly what we were when you saw us last ;—I, miserable on account of God's departure from me, which I believe to be final ; and she, seeking His return to me in the path of duty, and by continual prayer.—Yours, my dear Friend, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Olney, Oct. 6, 1786.

You have not heard, I suppose, that the ninth book of my translation is at the bottom of the Thames. But

it is even so. A storm overtook it in its way to Kingston, and it sunk, together with the whole cargo of the boat in which it was a passenger;—not figuratively showing, I hope, by its submersion, the fate of all the rest. My kind and generous Cousin, who leaves nothing undone that she thinks can conduce to my comfort, encouragement, or convenience, is my transcriber also. *She* wrote the copy, and *she* will have to write it again.——*Hers* therefore is the damage. I have a thousand reasons to lament that the time approaches when we must lose her. She has made a winterly summer a most delightful one, but the winter itself we must spend without her. W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Weston Underwood, Nov. 17, 1786.

My dear Friend—My usual time of answering your letters having been unavoidably engrossed by occasions that would not be thrust aside, I have been obliged to postpone the payment of my debt for a whole week. Even now it is not without some difficulty that I discharge it; which you will easily believe, when I tell you that this is only the second day that has seen us inhabitants of our new abode. When God speaks to a chaos, it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment; but when His creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labour and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to furniture of all kinds, however convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my Cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonized. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, in the evening, Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison

and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heartache when I took my last leave of a scene, that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God; but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of His absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting. What consequences are to attend our removal, God only knows. I know well that it is not in situation to effect a cure of melancholy like mine. The change, however, has been entirely a providential one; for much as I wished it, I never uttered that wish, except to Mrs. Unwin. When I learned that the house was to be let, and had seen it, I had a strong desire that Lady Hesketh should take it for herself, if she should happen to like the country. That desire, indeed, is not exactly fulfilled; and yet, upon the whole, is exceeded. We are the tenants; but she assures us that we shall often have her for a guest; and here is room enough for us all. You, I hope, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton, will want no assurances to convince you that you will always be received here with the sincerest welcome. More welcome than you have been, you cannot be; but better accommodated you may and will be.

I have not proceeded thus far without many interruptions, and though my paper is small, shall be obliged to make my letter still smaller. Our own removal is I believe the only news of Olney. Concerning this you will hear much, and much I doubt not that will have no truth in it. It is already

reported there, and has been indeed for some time, that I am turned Papist. You will know how to treat a lie like this which proves nothing but the malignity of its author; but other tales you may possibly hear that will not so readily refute themselves. This, however, I trust you will always find true, that neither Mrs. Unwin nor myself shall have so conducted ourselves in our new neighbourhood, as that you shall have any occasion to be grieved on our account. . . .

Adieu, my dear Friend. Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances and mine conclude me ever yours,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston Lodge, Nov. 26, 1786.

It is my birthday, my beloved Cousin, and I determine to employ a part of it, that it may not be destitute of festivity, in writing to you. The dark, thick fog that has obscured it, would have been a burthen to me at Olney, but here I have hardly attended to it. The neatness and snugness of our abode compensate all the dreariness of the season, and whether the ways are wet or dry, our house at least is always warm and commodious. Oh for you, my Cousin, to partake these comforts with us! I will not begin already to tease you upon that subject, but Mrs. Unwin remembers to have heard from your own lips, that you hate London in the spring. Perhaps therefore by that time, you may be glad to escape from a scene which will be everyday growing more disagreeable, that you may enjoy the comforts of the lodge. You well know that the best house has a desolate appearance unfurnished. This house accordingly, since it has been occupied by us and our *meubles*, is as much superior to what it was when you saw it, as you can imagine. The parlour is even elegant. When I say that the parlour is elegant, I do not mean to insinuate that the study is not so. It is neat, warm, and silent, and a much better study than I deserve, if I do not produce in it

an incomparable translation of Homer. I think every-day of those lines of Milton, and congratulate myself on having obtained, before I am quite superannuated, what he seems not to have hoped for sooner :

> And may at length my weary age
> Find out the peaceful hermitage!

For if it is not an hermitage, at least it is a much better thing; and you must always understand, my dear, that when poets talk of cottages, hermitages, and such like things, they mean a house with six sashes in front, two comfortable parlours, a smart staircase, and three bedchambers of convenient dimensions; in short, exactly such a house as this.

The Throckmortons continue the most obliging neighbours in the world. One morning last week, they both went with me to the cliff;—a scene, my dear, in which you would delight beyond measure, but which you cannot visit except in the spring or autumn. The heat of summer and the clinging dirt of winter would destroy you. What is called the cliff, is no cliff, nor at all like one, but a beautiful terrace, sloping gently down to the Ouse, and from the brow of which, though not lofty, you have a view of such a valley as makes that which you see from the hills near Olney, and which I have had the honour to celebrate, an affair of no consideration.

Wintry as the weather is, do not suspect that it confines me. I ramble daily, and everyday change my ramble. Wherever I go, I find short grass under my feet, and when I have travelled perhaps five miles, come home with shoes not at all too dirty for a drawing-room. I was pacing yesterday under the elms, that surround the field in which stands the great alcove, when lifting my eyes I saw two black genteel figures bolt through a hedge into the path where I was walking. You guess already who they were, and that they could be nobody but our neighbours. They had seen me from a hill at a distance, and had traversed a great turnip-field to get at me.

You see therefore, my dear, that I am in some request. . . .

Good-night, and may God bless thee. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Dec. 4, 1786.

I sent you, my dear, a melancholy letter, and I do not know that I shall now send you one very unlike it.[1] Not that anything occurs in consequence of our late loss more afflictive than was to be expected, but the mind does not perfectly recover its tone after a shock like that which has been felt so lately. This I observe, that though my experience has long since taught me, that this is a world of shadows, and that it is the more prudent, as well as the more Christian course to possess the comforts that we find in it, as if we possessed them not, it is no easy matter to reduce this doctrine into practice. We forget that that God who gave them, may, when He pleases, take them away; and that perhaps it may please Him to take them at a time when we least expect, or are least disposed to part from them. Thus it has happened in the present case. There never was a moment in Unwin's life, when there seemed to be more urgent want of him than the moment in which he died. He had attained to an age when, if they are at any time useful, men become useful to their families, their friends, and the world. His parish began to feel, and to be sensible of the advantages of his ministry. The clergy around him were many of them awed by his example. His children were thriving under his own tuition and management, and his eldest boy is likely to feel his loss severely, being by his years in some respect qualified to understand the value of such a parent; by his literary proficiency too clever for a schoolboy, and too young at the same time for the university. The removal of a man in the prime of life of such a character, and with such connexions,

[1] A letter on the death of the Rev. W. C. Unwin.

seems to make a void in society that can never be filled. God seemed to have made him just what he was, that he might be a blessing to others, and when the influence of his character and abilities began to be felt, removed him. These are mysteries, my dear, that we cannot contemplate without astonishment, but which will nevertheless be explained hereafter, and must in the meantime be revered in silence. It is well for his mother, that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence, else I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne. She derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought that he lived the life, and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin ! the first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St. Albans, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more. W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Weston, Dec. 9, 1786.

My dear Friend— . . . I find myself here situated exactly to my mind. Weston is one of the prettiest villages in England, and the walks about it at all seasons of the year delightful. I know that you will rejoice with me in the change that we have made, and for which I am altogether indebted to Lady Hesketh. It is a change as great as (to compare metropolitan things with rural) from St. Giles's to Grosvenor Square. Our house is in all respects commodious, and in some degree elegant ; and I cannot give you a better idea of that which we have left, than by telling you the present candidates for it are a publican and a shoemaker. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Dec. 11, 1786.

Shenstone, my dearest Cousin, in his commentary on the vulgar adage which says, Second thoughts are best, observes that the *third* thought generally resolves itself into the *first*. Thus it has happened to me. My first thought was to effect a transposition of the old glasses into the new frame; my second, that perhaps both the old glasses and the new frame might be broken in the experiment; and my third, nevertheless, to make the trial. Accordingly I walked down to Olney this day, referred the matter to the watchmaker's consideration, and he has succeeded in the attempt to a wonder. I am at this moment peering through the same medium as usual, but with the advantage of a more ornamental mounting. I conjecture, by the way, from a passage in your note that accompanied the parcel, that I am indebted not *only* to you for this new accession to my elegant accommodations, but to some Incognito likewise; I beg that you will present my thanks accordingly. The clerk of the parish has made me a new pair of straps to my buckles; and the gingerbread, by its genial warmth, has delivered me since dinner from a distension of stomach that was immoderately troublesome, so that I am the better for you, my dear, from head to foot. Long time I in vain endeavoured to make myself master of the lamp, and was obliged at last to call in William to my assistance. Now there are certain things which great geniuses miss, and which men born without any understanding at all hit immediately. In justification of the truth of this remark, William, who is a lump of dough, who never can be more dead than he is till he has been buried a month, explained it to *me* in a moment; accordingly we have used it twice, to my great satisfaction.

I sent Fuseli a hare by the coach that went up this morning, and certainly no man could better deserve it, though it was one of the largest that ever was seen. I could not resist the impulse that I felt to acknowledge

my obligations to his critical exertions; and yet shall be sorry that I complied with it, if in consequence of my civility he should become at all less rigorous in his demands, or less severe in his animadversions. I am on the point of finishing the correction of the ninth book, which I have now adjusted to two sheets filled with his strictures. He observes at the close of them, that to execute a translation of this book in particular, with felicity, appears to him a prodigious task. He considers it, and I think justly, as one of the most consummate efforts of genius handed down to us from antiquity, and calls upon me for my utmost exertions. I have not failed to make them, with what success will be seen hereafter; but of this I am sure, that I have much improved it. The good-natured Padre of the Hall has offered me, in Mrs. Throckmorton's absence, his transcribing assistance, of which I shall avail myself, and deliver over to him the book in question in a day or two.

Mr. Chester paid me a morning visit about the middle of last week. He was, though a man naturally reserved, chatty and good humoured on the occasion, and when he took leave begged that I would not put myself to inconvenience for the sake of returning his visit with a punctilious alacrity in this wet and dirty season:—an allowance for which I was obliged to him, for since we now live five miles asunder, and I never ride, it does not at present occur to me by what means I could possibly get at him.

Our old house is not yet tenanted, but there are candidates for it. They are two who would divide the building between them—a shoemaker, and the alemonger at the Horse and Groom. The carpenter in the meantime has assured Mr. Smith, the landlord, that unless it be well propped and speedily it will infallibly fall. Thank you, my dear, for saving our poor noddles from such imminent danger.

I learned to-day, at the Bull, that the liquors which the General has sent me I may expect to see here to-morrow; there are four hampers of sherry, and

one of brandy and rum. The looking-glass which you destined to the study,—that, I mean, which came out of your chamber at the vicarage,—we have ventured to put up in the parlour. It is quite large enough, and makes a very smart appearance. The other, which you may remember to have seen in my chamber at Olney, we have transferred to Nibbs, who, being paid for a new frame, is to furnish us with a new glass for it. . . .

The cloud that I mentioned to you, my Cousin, has passed away, or perhaps the skirts of it may still hang over me. I feel myself, however, tolerably brisk, and tell you so because I know you will be glad to hear it. The grinners at *John Gilpin* little dream what the author sometimes suffers. How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it!

May God bless thee, my dear! adieu. Ever yours,
W. C.

Soon after this reaches you, we hope that you will receive a turkey. It was Mrs. Throckmorton's legacy to us when she went. It never had the honour to be crammed, for she crams none, but perhaps may not be the worse in flavour on that account. She fed it daily with her own hand.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston, Dec. 21, 1786.

Your welcome letter, my beloved Cousin, which ought by the date to have arrived on Sunday, being by some untoward accident delayed, came not till yesterday. It came however, and has relieved me from a thousand distressing apprehensions on your account.

The dew of your intelligence has refreshed my poetical laurels. A little praise now and then is very good for your hard-working poet, who is apt to grow languid, and perhaps careless without it. Praise I find affects us as money does. The more a man gets of it, with the more vigilance he watches over and preserves it. Such at least is its effect on me, and you may

assure yourself that I will never lose a mite of it for want of care.

I have already invited the good Padre in general terms, and he shall positively dine here next week, whether he will or not. I do not at all suspect that his kindness to Protestants has anything insidious in it, any more than I suspect that he transcribes Homer for me with a view for my conversion. He would find me a tough piece of business I can tell him; for when I had no religion at all, I had yet a terrible dread of the Pope. How much more now!

I should have sent you a longer letter, but was obliged to devote my last evening to the melancholy employment of composing a Latin inscription for the tombstone of poor William, two copies of which I wrote out and enclosed, one to Henry Thornton, and one to Mr. Newton. Homer stands by me biting his thumbs, and swears that if I do not leave off directly, he will choke me with bristly Greek, that shall stick in my throat for ever.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1786.

You must by no means, my dearest Coz, pursue the plan that has suggested itself to you on the supposed loss of your letter. In the first place I choose that my Sundays, like the Sundays of other people, shall be distinguished by something that shall make me look forward to them with agreeable expectation, and for that reason desire that they may always bring me a letter from you. In the next place, if I know when to *expect* a letter, I know likewise when to *inquire after* a letter, if it happens not to come; a circumstance of some importance, considering how excessively careless they are at the Swan, where letters are sometimes overlooked, and do not arrive at their destination, if no inquiry be made, till some days have passed after their arrival at Olney. It has happened frequently to me to receive a letter long after all the rest have been delivered, and the Padre assured me that Mr. Throckmorton has sent

notes three several times to Mrs. Marriot, complaining of this neglect. For these reasons, my dear, thou must write still on Saturdays, and as often on other days as thou pleasest.

The screens came safe, and one of them is at this moment interposed between me and the fire, much to the comfort of my peepers. The other of them being fitted up with a screw that was useless, I have consigned to proper hands, that it may be made as serviceable as its brother. They are very neat, and I account them a great acquisition. Our carpenter assures me that the lameness of the chairs was not owing to any injury received in their journey, but that the maker never properly finished them. They were not high when they came, and in order to reduce them to a level, we have lowered them an inch. Thou knowest, child, that the short foot could not be lengthened, for which reason we shortened the long ones The box containing the plate and the brooms reached us yesterday, and nothing had suffered the least damage by the way. Everything is smart, everything is elegant, and we admire them all. The short candle-sticks are short enough. I am now writing with those upon the table; Mrs. U. is reading opposite, and they suit us both exactly. With the money that you have in hand, you may purchase, my dear, at your most convenient time, a tea-urn; that which we have at present having never been handsome, and being now old and patched. A parson once, as he walked across the parlour, pushed it down with his belly, and it never perfectly recovered itself. We want likewise a tea-waiter, meaning, if you please, such a one as you may remember to have seen at the Hall, a wooden one. To which you may add, from the same fund, three or four yards of yard-wide muslin, wherewithal to make neckcloths for my worship. If after all these disbursements anything should be left in the bottom of the purse, we shall be obliged to you if you will expend it in the purchase of silk pocket-handkerchiefs. There, my precious—I think I have charged thee with commissions in plenty.

You neither must nor shall deny us the pleasure of sending to you such small matters as we do. As to the partridges, you may recollect possibly, when I remind you of it, that I never eat them; they refuse to pass my stomach; and Mrs. Unwin rejoiced in receiving them only because she could pack them away to you—therefore never lay us under any embargoes of this kind, for I tell you beforehand, that we are both incorrigible. My beloved Cousin, the first thing I open my eyes upon in a morning, is it not the bed in which you have laid me? Did you not, in our old dismal parlour at Olney, give me the tea on which I breakfast?—the chocolate that I drank at noon, and the table at which I dine?—the everything, in short, that I possess in the shape of convenience, is it not all from you? and is it possible, think you, that we should either of us overlook an opportunity of making such a tiny acknowledgement of your kindness? Assure yourself that never, while my name is Giles Gingerbread, will I dishonour my glorious ancestry, and my illustrious appellation, by so unworthy a conduct. I love you at my heart, and so does Mrs. U., and we must say thank you, and send you a peppercorn when we can. So thank you, my dear, for the brawn and the chine, and for all the good things that you announce, and at present I will, for your sake, say no more of thanksgiving. . . .

I am, my dearest, your most Gingerbread Giles, &c.

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, Jan. 3, 1787.

My dear Friend—You wish to hear from me at any calm interval of epic frenzy. An interval presents itself, but whether calm or not, is perhaps doubtful. Is it possible for a man to be calm, who for three weeks past has been perpetually occupied in slaughter,—letting out one man's bowels, smiting another through the gullet, transfixing the liver of another, and lodging

an arrow in the buttock of a fourth? Read the thirteenth book of the *Iliad*, and you will find such amusing incidents as these the subject of it, the sole subject. In order to interest myself in it, and to catch the spirit of it, I had need discard all humanity. It is woeful work; and were the best poet in the world to give us at this day such a list of killed and wounded, he would not escape universal censure, to the praise of a more enlightened age be it spoken. I have waded through much blood, and through much more I must wade before I shall have finished. I determine in the meantime to account it all very sublime, and for two reasons, —First, because all the learned think so; and secondly, because I am to translate it. But were I an indifferent bystander, perhaps I should venture to wish that Homer had applied his wonderful powers to a less disgusting subject. He has in the *Odyssey*, and I long to get at it.

I have not the good fortune to meet with any of these fine things, that you say are printed in my praise. But I learn from certain advertisements in the *Morning Herald*, that I make a conspicuous figure in the entertainments of Freemasons' Hall. I learn also that my volumes are out of print, and that a third edition is soon to be published. But if I am not gratified with the sight of odes composed to my honour and glory, I have at least been tickled with some *douceurs* of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the best of men;—an unknown gentleman has read my inimitable poems, and invites me to his seat in Hampshire;—another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden, and a Welsh attorney sends me his verses to revise, and obligingly asks,

> Say, shall my little bark attendant sail,
> Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale?

If you find me a little vain hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater.

Mrs. Unwin is as much delighted as myself with our present situation. But it is a sort of April-weather life that we lead in this world. A little sunshine is generally the prelude to a storm. Hardly had we begun to enjoy the change, when the death of her son cast a gloom upon everything. He was a most exemplary man; of your order; learned, polite, and amiable. The father of lovely children, and the husband of a wife (very much like dear Mrs. Bagot) who adored him.—Adieu, my Friend! Your affectionate W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Jan. 18, 1787.

I have been so much indisposed with the fever that I told you had seized me, my nights during the whole week may be said to have been almost sleepless. The consequence has been, that except the translation of about thirty lines at the conclusion of the thirteenth book, I have been forced to abandon Homer entirely. This was a sensible mortification to me, as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard therefore to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day-time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly, that is to say, Mrs. Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time, and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world.

Mrs. Carter thinks on the subject of dreams as everybody else does, that is to say, according to her own experience. She has had no extraordinary ones, and

therefore accounts them only the ordinary operations of the fancy. Mine are of a texture that will not suffer me to ascribe them to so inadequate a cause, or to any cause but the operation of an exterior agency. I have a mind, my dear (and to you I will venture to boast of it) as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. Some very sensible persons, and I suppose Mrs. Carter among them, will acknowledge that in old times God spoke by dreams, but affirm with much boldness that He has since ceased to do so. If you ask them, why? they answer, because He has now revealed His will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that He should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts He has left us in want of nothing; but has He thereby precluded Himself in any of the operations of His Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration; and the same need that there ever was of His interference in this way, there is still, and ever must be, while man continues blind and fallible, and a creature beset with dangers which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations however of this kind are, I allow, very rare; and as to the generality of dreams, they are made of such stuff, and are in themselves so insignificant, that though I believe them all to be the manufacture of others, not our own, I account it not a farthing-matter who manufactures them. So much for dreams!

My fever is not yet gone, but sometimes seems to leave me. It is altogether of the nervous kind, and attended, now and then, with much dejection.

A young gentleman called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey to London from Glasgow, having just left the university there. He came I suppose partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of some of the Scotch professors for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman.

Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it.—Adieu, very affectionately, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, July 24, 1787.

Dear Sir—This is the first time I have written these six months, and nothing but the constraint of obligation could induce me to write now. I cannot be so wanting to myself as not to endeavour at least to thank you both for the visits with which you have favoured me, and the poems that you sent me; in my present state of mind I taste nothing, nevertheless I read, partly from habit, and partly because it is the only thing that I am capable of.

I have therefore read Burns's poems, and have read them twice; and though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is I believe the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life since Shakespeare (I should rather say since Prior), who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured. It will be pity if he should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel. He who can command admiration, dishonours himself if he aims no higher than to raise a laugh.

I am, dear sir, with my best wishes for your prosperity, and with Mrs. Unwin's respects, your obliged and affectionate humble servant, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Aug. 27, 1787.

Dear Sir—I have not yet taken up the pen again, except to write to you. The little taste that I have

had of your company, and your kindness in finding me out, make me wish that we were nearer neighbours, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years; that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life, I flatter myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me, will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if, on a future occasion, I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so,—is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects, as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the use of it, I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle. The only mercy that I show myself in this respect is, that I read nothing that requires much closeness of application. I lately finished the perusal of a book, which in former years I have more than once attacked, but never till now conquered; some other book always interfered before I could finish it. The work I mean is Barclay's *Argenis*; and if ever you allow yourself to read for mere amusement, I can recommend it to you (provided you have not already perused it), as the most amusing romance that ever was written. It is the only one indeed of an old date that I ever had the patience to go through with. It is interesting in a high degree; richer in incident than can be imagined, full of surprises, which the reader never forestalls, and yet free

from all entanglement and confusion. The style too appears to me to be such as would not dishonour Tacitus himself.

Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country, through our ignorance of his language. I despair of meeting with any Englishman who will take the pains that I have taken to understand him. His candle is bright, but shut up in a dark lantern. I lent him to a very sensible neighbour of mine: but his uncouth dialect spoiled all; and before he had half read him through, he was quite *ramfeezled*.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Aug. 30, 1787.

My dearest Cousin—Though it costs me something to write, it would cost me more to be silent. My intercourse with my neighbours being renewed, I can no longer seem to forget how many reasons there are, why you especially should not be neglected,—no neighbour indeed, but the kindest of my friends, and ere long, I hope, an inmate.

My health and spirits seem to be mending daily: to what end I know not, neither will conjecture, but endeavour, as far as I can, to be content that they do so. I use exercise, and take the air in the park and wilderness: I read much, but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends, than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr. Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his ground, has now given me possession of his library: an acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my own. By his means I have been so well supplied, that I have not yet even looked at *The Lounger*, for which however I do not forget that I

am obliged to you. *His* turn comes next, and I shall probably begin him to-morrow.

Mr. George Throckmorton is at the Hall. I thought I had known these brothers long enough to have found out all their talents and accomplishments; but I was mistaken. The day before yesterday, after having walked with us, they *carried* us up to the library (a more accurate writer would have said, *conducted* us), and then they showed me the contents of an immense portfolio, the work of their own hands. It was furnished with drawings of the architectural kind, executed in a most masterly manner, and among others, contained outside and inside views of the Pantheon,—I mean the Roman one. They were all, I believe, made at Rome. Some men may be estimated at a first interview, but the Throckmortons must be seen often, and known long, before one can understand all their value.

They often inquire after you, and ask me whether you visit Weston this autumn. I answer, yes; and I charge you, my dearest Cousin, to authenticate my information. Write to me, and tell us when we may expect to see you. We were disappointed that we had no letter from you this morning. You will find me coated and buttoned according to your recommendation.

I write but little, because writing is become new to me; but I shall come on by degrees. Mrs. Unwin begs to be affectionately remembered to you. She is in tolerable health, which is the chief comfort here that I have to boast of.—Yours, my dearest Cousin, as ever, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Sept. 4, 1787.

My dearest Coz—Come when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry that your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you; sorry too that my uncle's

infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who like him escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some smatch of my youth,* I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect, *when I least expect it,* to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future.

Mr. G. is here, Mrs. Throckmorton's uncle. He is lately arrived from Italy, where he has resided several years, and is so much the gentleman, that it is impossible to be more so: sensible, polite, obliging; slender in his figure, and in manners most engaging,—every way worthy to be related to the Throckmortons.

I have read Savary's *Travels into Egypt*; *Memoirs du Baron de Tott*; Fenn's *Original Letters*; *The Letters of Frederic of Bohemia*; and am now reading *Memoirs d'Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise.* I have also read Barclay's *Argenis,* a Latin romance, and the best romance that ever was written. All these, together with Madan's *Letters to Priestley,* and several pamphlets, within these two months. So I am a great reader.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Sept. 8, 1787.

. . . Thanks to your choice, I wear the most elegant buttons in all this country: they have been much admired at the Hall. When my waistcoat is made I shall be quite acccomplished. You have made us both happy by giving us a nearer prospect of your arrival. But Mrs. Unwin says you must not fix an early day for your departure, nor talk of staying only two or three weeks, because it will be a thorn that she shall lean upon all the time that you are here; and so say I. It is a comfort to be informed when a visitor will go

whom we wish to be rid of, but the reverse of a comfort, my Cousin, when you are in the question. . . .

The Throcks, as you observe, are Foxites; but their moderation in party matters is such, that in all the interviews we have had this summer, the string of politics has never been touched. Upon recollection, I must except a single instance, in which Peter Pindar, whose last piece Mr. Throckmorton lent me, furnished the occasion. But even then, though I took the opportunity of speaking my mind of that licentious lampooner of dignities very freely, we had no dispute. It was agreed on all hands to be great pity, considering the ill effect of such political ribaldry on the minds of the multitude, that the court has not stopped his mouth with a bribe;—nobody doubted that he would open it wide enough for the reception of a large one. How contemptible is wit so miserably misemployed! . . .

Yours, my dear, ever, WM. COWPER.

To LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Sept. 15, 1787.

My dearest Cousin—On Monday last I was invited to meet your friend Miss Jekyll at the Hall, and there we found her. Her good nature, her humorous manner, and her good sense, are charming; insomuch that even I, who was never much addicted to speech-making, and who at present find myself particularly indisposed to it, could not help saying at parting, I am glad that I have seen you, and sorry that I have seen so little of you. We were sometimes many in company: on Thursday we were fifteen, but we had not altogether so much vivacity and cleverness as Miss Jekyll, whose talent at mirth-making has this rare property to recommend it, that nobody suffers by it.

I am making a gravel walk for winter use, under a warm hedge in the orchard. It shall be furnished with a low seat for your accommodation, and if you do but like it I shall be satisfied. In wet weather, or rather after wet weather, when the street is dirty, it will suit

you well, for lying on an easy declivity through its whole length, it must of course be immediately dry.

You are very much wished for by our friends at the Hall :—how much by me I will not tell you till the second week in October.—Yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Sept. 20, 1787.

For the more effectual abatement of your furious ire, my dearest Coz, on the subject of these same partridges, it is expedient you should be told that we sent you only a *part* of the last present of that sort which we received from the Hall. Know also that when we found ourselves disposed to stew or to pot, we have an abundant supply of pigeons for those purposes from our neighbour's dove-cote, Mrs. Throck having given us the use of it at discretion. . . .

I read with much pleasure, my dear Cousin, the account that you give of my uncle, his snug and calm way of living, the neatness of his little person, and the cheerfulness of his spirit. How happy is he at so advanced an age to have those with him whose chief delight is to entertain him, and to be susceptible as he is of being amused. Longevity, that in general either deprives a man of his friends, or if not, of the power of enjoying their conversation, deals with *him* more gently, and still indulges him in the possession of those privileges which alone make life desirable. May he long continue to possess them! I acquiesce entirely in the justness of your reasoning on this subject, and must need confess that were I your father, I should with great reluctance resign you to the demands of any cousin in the world. I shall be happy to see you, my dear, yet once again, but not till I can enjoy that happiness without the violation of any proprieties on your part,—not till he can spare you. Give my love to him, and tell him that I am not so much younger than he is, now, as I was when I saw him last. As years proceed, the difference between the elder and

the younger is gradually reduced to nothing. But you will come; and in the meantime the rich and the poor rejoice in the expectation of you; to whom may be added a third sort,—ourselves for instance, who are of neither of those descriptions. . . .

I received a letter yesterday, enclosing a Bank-note, and copy it for your edification :—

Sir—A friend of yours, hearing where you reside, begs your acceptance of a ten pound note.—I am, sir, &c.

Est ce par hazard le Monsieur Dalling dont vous m'avez jadis fait le récit?—Yours, my beloved Cousin,

Wm. Cowper.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Oct. 19, 1787.

Dear Sir—A summons from Johnson, which I received yesterday, calls my attention once more to the business of translation. Before I begin I am willing to catch though but a short opportunity to acknowledge your last favour. The necessity of applying myself with all diligence to a long work that has been but too long interrupted, will make my opportunities of writing rare in future.

Air and exercise are necessary to all men, but particularly so to the man whose mind labours; and to him who has been all his life accustomed to much of both, they are necessary in the extreme. My time since we parted has been devoted entirely to the recovery of health and strength for this service, and I am willing to hope with good effect. Ten months have passed since I discontinued my poetical efforts; I do not expect to find the same readiness as before, till exercise of the neglected faculty, such as it is, shall have restored it to me.

You find yourself, I hope, by this time as comfortably situated in your new abode, as in a new abode one can be. I enter perfectly into all your feelings on occasion of the change. A sensible mind cannot do violence even to a local attachment without much pain. When my father died I was young, too young to have

reflected much. He was Rector of Berkhamstead, and there I was born. It had never occurred to me that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then, and not till then, I felt for the first time that I and my native place were disunited for ever. I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I should never be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Saturday, Oct. 27, 1787.

My dearest Cousin—Now that there is something like a time appointed, I feel myself a little more at my ease. Days and weeks slide imperceptibly away; November is just at hand, and the half of it, as you observe, will soon be over. Then, no impediment intervening, we shall meet once more,—a happiness of which I so lately despaired. My uncle, who so kindly spared you before, will I doubt not spare you again. He knows that a little frisk in country air will be serviceable to you; and even to my welfare, which is not a little concerned in the matter, I am persuaded he is not indifferent. For this and for many other reasons I ardently wish that he may enjoy and long enjoy the present measure of health with which he is favoured. Our wants are included within the compass of two items. *I* want a watch-string, and we *both* are in want of certain things, called candle-ends, but of wax, not *tallow-fats*. Those with which you furnished us at Olney are not quite expended indeed, but are drawing near to their dissolution. Should I after further scrutiny discover any other deficiencies, you shall know them.

You need not, my dear, be under any apprehensions lest I should too soon engage again in the translation of Homer. My health and strength of spirits for this service are, I believe, exactly in *statu quo prius*. But Mrs. Unwin having enlarged upon this head, I will therefore say the less. Whether I shall live to finish it, or whether, if I should, I shall live to enjoy any fruit of my labours, are articles in my account of such extreme uncertainty, that I feel them often operate as no small discouragement. But uncertain as these things are, I yet consider the employment *essential* to my present well-being, and pursue it accordingly. But had Pope been subject to the same alarming speculations, had he waking and sleeping dreamt as I do, I am inclined to think he would not have been my predecessor in these labours; for I compliment myself with a persuasion that I have more heroic valour, of the passive kind at least, than he had,—perhaps than any man; it would be strange had I not, after so much exercise.

By some accident or other it comes to pass that I see the Throckmortons daily. Yesterday, soon after I had received your letter, I met them armed with bow and arrows, going to practise at the target in the garden. I consulted them on the subject of the best road from Newport hither, and the prevailing opinion was in favour of the road through Emberton. It is rough, indeed, but not so heavy as the road by Gayhurst. Mrs. Throck, anxious to put the matter past all doubt, cut a caper on the grass-plot, and said she would go ride to Olney immediately on purpose to examine the road. If her report contains any thing material, you shall hear it. . . .

Farewell, my dearest Coz! the month that you speak of will be short indeed, unless you can contrive to lengthen it.—Ever yours, WM. COWPER.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Nov. 3, 1787.

Suffer not thyself, my dearest Coz, to be seduced

from thy purpose. There are those among thy friends and kindred who being covetous of thy company will endeavour to keep thee near them, and the better to effect their machinations, will possess thee, if they can, with many megrims concerning the roads and the season of the year. But heed them not. They only do what I should do myself were I in their predicament, who certainly should not fail, for my own sake, to represent your intended journey as an enterprise rather to be admired than approved—more bold than prudent. The turnpike, as you well know, will facilitate your progress every inch of the way till you come to Sherrington, and from Sherrington hither you will find the way equally safe, though undoubtedly a little rough. Rough it was when you were here, such it is still, but not rougher than then, nor will it be so. The reason is this—that the soil being naturally a rock is very little, or rather not at all affected by the season, for as thou well knowest, no showers will melt a stone. The distance also from Sherrington toll-gate to our door is but four miles and a quarter. The only reason why I do not recommend the back road rather than this, is because it is apt to be heavy; in other respects it deserves the preference, for it is just as safe as the other, and from the turning at Gayhurst, is shorter than that by a mile and a half. The Throcks travel them both continually, and so do all the chaises and coaches in the country, and I never heard of an accident to any of them in all the twenty years that I have lived in it. Mr. and Mrs. Throck, understanding that you are a little apprehensive on this subject, begged me yesterday evening to tell you that *they* will send their servant to meet you at Newport, who will direct your *cocher* to all the best and most commodious quarters. As to the season of the year, I grant that it is November. It would be but folly to deny it. But what then?—Does not the sun shine in November? One would imagine that it did not, could not, or would not, were we to listen only to the suggestions of certain persons. But, my dear, the matter is far otherwise;

nay it is even just the reverse ; for he not only shines, but with such splendour too, that I write at this moment in a room heated by his beams, and with the curtain at my side let down on purpose to abate their fervour. Then let November have its just praise, and let not my Cousin fear to find the country pleasant even now. I have said it in verse, and I think it in prose, that as it is at all times preferable to the town, so is it especially preferable in winter, provided I mean that you have gravel to walk upon, of which there is no scarcity at Weston. . . .

I shall put the fourteenth *Iliad* into Mrs. Throck's hands in a day or two : I am at present only employed by blots and obliterations in making it more difficult for her to decipher.

Adieu, my dear. Our best love, and best wishes are always with you.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. Cowper.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Nov. 10, 1787.

The parliament, my dearest Cousin, prorogued continually, is a meteor dancing before my eyes, promising me my wish only to disappoint me, and none but the king and his ministers can tell when you and I shall come together. I hope however that the period, though so often postponed, is not far distant, and that once more I shall behold you, and experience your power to make winter gay and sprightly.

I have a kitten, my dear, the drollest of all creatures that ever wore a cat's skin. Her gambols are not to be described, and would be incredible, if they could. In point of size she is likely to be a kitten always, being extremely small of her age, but time I suppose, that spoils everything, will make her also a cat. You will see her I hope before that melancholy period shall arrive, for no wisdom that she may gain by experience and reflection hereafter, will compensate the loss of her present hilarity. She is dressed in a tortoise-shell suit, and I know that you will delight in her.

Mrs. Throckmorton carries us to-morrow in her chaise to Chicheley. The event, however, must be supposed to depend on elements, at least on the state of the atmosphere, which is turbulent beyond measure. Yesterday it thundered, last night it lightened, and at three this morning I saw the sky as red as a city in flames could have made it. I have a leech in a bottle that foretells all these prodigies and convulsions of nature: no, not as you will naturally conjecture by articulate utterance of oracular notices, but by a variety of gesticulations, which here I have not room to give an account of. Suffice it to say, that no change of weather surprises him, and that in point of the earliest and most accurate intelligence, he is worth all the barometers in the world. None of them all indeed can make the least pretence to foretell thunder—a species of capacity of which he has given the most unequivocal evidence. I gave but sixpence for him, which is a groat more than the market-price, though he is in fact, or rather would be, if leeches were not found in every ditch, an invaluable acquisition.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Nov. 27, 1787.

It is the part of wisdom, my dearest Cousin, to sit down contented under the demands of necessity, because they are such. I am sensible that you cannot in my uncle's present infirm state, and of which it is not possible to expect any considerable amendment, indulge either us, or yourself, with a journey to Weston. Yourself I say, both because I know it will give you pleasure to see *Causidice mi*[1] once more, especially in the comfortable abode where you have placed him, and because after so long an imprisonment in London, you who love the country and have a taste for it, would of course be glad to return to it. For my own part, to me it is ever new, and though I have now

[1] The appellation which Sir Thomas Hesketh used to give him in jest, when he was of the Temple.

been an inhabitant of this village a twelvemonth, and have during the half of that time been at liberty to expatiate, and to make discoveries, I am daily finding out fresh scenes and walks, which you would never be satisfied with enjoying ;—some of them are unapproachable by you either on foot or in your carriage. Had you twenty toes (whereas I suppose you have but ten) you could not reach them ; and coach wheels have never been seen there since the flood. Before it indeed (as Burnet says that the earth was then perfectly free from all inequalities in its surface), they might have been seen there every day. We have other walks both upon hill-tops and in valleys beneath, some of which by the help of your carriage, and many of them without its help, would be always at your command.

On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows : 'Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All-Saints, in Northampton ; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You would do me a great favour, Sir, if you would furnish me with one.' To this, I replied. 'Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox, the statuary, who, everybody knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose.'—'Alas! Sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading, that the people of our town cannot understand him.' I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, Perhaps, my good Friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my Muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt

my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The wagon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one*, that serves *two hundred* persons.

A few days since, I received a second very obliging letter from Mr. Mackenzie. He tells me that his own papers, which are by far, he is sorry to say it, the most numerous, are marked V. I. Z. Accordingly, my dear, I am happy to find that I am engaged in a correspondence with Mr. Viz, a gentleman for whom I have always entertained the profoundest veneration. But the serious fact is, that the papers distinguished by those signatures have ever pleased me most, and struck me as the work of a sensible man, who knows the world well, and has more of Addison's delicate humour than anybody.

A poor man begged food at the Hall lately. The cook gave him some vermicelli soup. He ladled it about sometime with the spoon, and then returned it to her, saying, 'I am a poor man it is true, and I am very hungry, but yet I cannot eat broth with maggots in it.' Once more, my dear, a thousand thanks for your box full of good things, useful things, and beautiful things.—Yours ever, W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, Dec. 6, 1787.

My dear Friend—A short time since, by the help of Mrs. Throckmorton's chaise, Mrs. Unwin and I reached Chicheley. . . .

For the increase of my pleasure, I had the good fortune to find your brother the Bishop there. We had much talk about many things, but most, I believe, about Homer; and great satisfaction it gave me to find, that on the most important points of that subject his Lordship and I were exactly of one mind. In the

course of our conversation he produced from his pocket-book a translation of the first ten or twelve lines of the *Iliad*, and in order to leave my judgement free, informed me kindly at the same time that they were not his own. I read them, and according to the best of my recollection of the original, found them well executed. The Bishop indeed acknowledged that they were not faultless, neither did I find them so. Had they been such, I should have felt their perfection as a discouragement hardly to be surmounted ; for at that passage I have laboured more abundantly than at any other, and hitherto with the least success. I am convinced that Homer placed it at the threshold of his work as a scarecrow to all translators. Now, Walter, if thou knowest the author of this version, and it be not treason against thy brother's confidence in thy secrecy, declare him to me. Had I been so happy as to have seen the Bishop again before he left this country, I should certainly have asked him the question, having a curiosity upon the matter that is extremely troublesome.

The awkward situation in which you found yourself on receiving a visit from an authoress, whose works though presented to you long before, you had never read, made me laugh, and it was no sin against my friendship for you, to do so. It was a ridiculous distress, and I can laugh at it even now. I hope she catechized you well. How did you extricate yourself? Now laugh at me. The clerk of the parish of All Saints, in the town of Northampton, having occasion for a poet, has appointed me to the office. I found myself obliged to comply. The bellman comes next, and then, I think, though even borne upon your swan's quill, I can soar no higher !—I am, my dear Friend, faithfully yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Dec. 10, 1787.

I thank you for the snip of cloth, commonly called a pattern. At present I have two coats, and but one

back. If at any time hereafter I should find myself possessed of fewer coats, or more backs, it will be of use to me.

Even as you suspect, my dear, so it proved. The ball was prepared for, the ball was held, and the ball passed, and we had nothing to do with it. Mrs. Throckmorton, knowing our trim, did not give us the pain of an invitation, for a pain it would have been. And why? as Sternhold says,—because as Hopkins answers, we must have refused it. But it fell out singularly enough, that this ball was held, of all days in the year, on my birthday—and so I told them—but not till it was all over. . . .

I do not always say, give my love to my uncle, because he knows that I always love him. I do not always present Mrs. Unwin's love to you, partly for the same reason (Deuce take the smith and the carpenter!) and partly because I forget it. But to present my own, I forget never, for I always have to finish my letter, which I know not how to do, my dearest Coz, without telling you that I am.—Ever yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Dec. 19, 1787 (*in Post mark*).

Saturday, my dearest Cousin, was a day of receipts. In the morning I received a box filled with an abundant variety of stationery ware, containing, in particular, a quantity of paper sufficient, well covered with good writing, to immortalize any man. I have nothing to do, therefore, but to cover it as aforesaid, and my name will never die. In the evening I received a smaller box, but still more welcome on account of its contents. It contained an almanack in red morocco, a pencil of a new invention, called an everlasting pencil, and a noble purse, with a noble gift in it, called a Bank-note for twenty-five pounds. I need use no arguments to assure you, my Cousin, that by the help of ditto note, we shall be able to fadge very comfortably till Christmas is turned, without having the least

occasion to draw upon you. By the post yesterday—that is, Sunday morning—I received also a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularized; in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, *The Drop of Ink*. The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and *Anonymous* there may be some communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it.

My toothache is in a great measure, that is to say, almost entirely, removed; not by snipping my ears, as poor Lady Strange's ears were snipped, nor by any other chirurgical operation, except such as I could perform myself. The manner of it was as follows: we dined last Thursday at the Hall; I sat down to table, trembling lest the tooth, of which I told you in my last, should not only refuse its own office, but hinder all the rest. Accordingly, in less than five minutes, by a hideous dislocation of it, I found myself not only in great pain, but under an absolute prohibition not only to eat, but to speak another word. Great emergencies sometimes meet with most effectual remedies. I resolved, if it were possible, then and there to draw it. This I effected so dexterously by a sudden twitch, and afterwards so dexterously conveyed it into my pocket, that no creature present, not even Mrs. Unwin, who sat facing me, was sensible either of my distress, or of the manner of my deliverance from it. I am poorer by one tooth than I was, but richer by the unimpeded use of all the rest. . . .

My dog, my dear, is a spaniel. Till Miss Gunning begged him, he was the property of a farmer, and while he was their property had been accustomed to lie in the chimney-corner, among the embers, till the hair was singed from his back, and till nothing was left of his tail but the gristle. Allowing for these disadvantages, he is really handsome; and when nature

shall have furnished him with a new coat, a gift which, in consideration of the ragged condition of his old one, it is hoped she will not long delay, he will then be unrivalled in personal endowments by any dog in this country. He and my cat are excessively fond of each other, and play a thousand gambols together that it is impossible not to admire. . . .

Returning from my walk to-day, while I was passing by some small closes at the back of the town, I heard the voices of some persons extremely merry at the top of the hill. Advancing into the large field behind the house, I there met Mr. Throck, wife, and brother George. Combine in your imagination as large proportions as you can of earth and water intermingled so as to constitute what is commonly called mud, and you will have but an imperfect conception of the quantity that had attached itself to her petticoats: but she had half-boots, and laughed at her own figure. She told me that she had this morning transcribed sixteen pages of my Homer. I observed in reply, that to write so much, and to gather all that dirt, was no bad morning's work, considering the shortness of the days at this season.—Yours, my dear, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Dec. 24, 1787.

My dearest Cousin—The Throcks do not leave Weston till after Easter. But this I hope will have no effect upon your movements, should an opportunity present itself to you of coming sooner. We dined there last Saturday. After dinner, while we all sat round the fire, I told them, as I related it to you, the adventure of my tooth. This drew from Mrs. Throck (singular as it must appear), a tale the very counterpart of mine. She, in like manner, had a tooth to draw, while I was drawing mine; and thus it came to pass (the world, I suppose, could not furnish such another instance) that we two, without the least intimation to each other of our respective distress, were

employed in the same moment, sitting side by side, in drawing each a tooth : an operation which we performed with equal address, and without being perceived by any one.

This morning had very near been a tragical one to me, beyond all that have ever risen upon me. Mrs. Unwin rose as usual at seven o'clock ; at eight she came to me, and showed me her bed-gown with a great piece burnt out of it. Having lighted her fire, which she always lights herself, she placed the candle upon the hearth. In a few moments it occurred to her that, if it continued there, it might possibly set fire to her clothes, therefore she put it out. But in fact, though she had not the least suspicion of it, her clothes were on fire at that very time. She found herself uncommonly annoyed by smoke, such as brought the water into her eyes ; supposing that some of the billets might lie too forward, she disposed them differently ; but finding the smoke increase, and grow more troublesome (for by this time the room was full of it), she cast her eye downward, and perceived not only her bed-gown, but her petticoat on fire. She had the presence of mind to gather them in her hand, and plunge them immediately into the basin, by which means the general conflagration of her person, which must have probably ensued in a few moments, was effectually prevented. Thus was that which I have often heard from the pulpit, and have often had occasion myself to observe, most clearly illustrated,—that, secure as we may sometimes seem to ourselves, we are in reality never so safe as to have no need of a superintending Providence. Danger can never be at a distance from creatures who dwell in houses of clay. Therefore take care of thyself, gentle Yahoo ! and may a more vigilant than thou care for thee. . . .

I forgot to tell you that my dog is spotted liver-colour and white, or rather white and chestnut. He is at present my pupil as well as dog, and just before I sat down to write I gave him a lesson in the science of fetch and carry. He performs with an animation

past all conception, except your own, whose poor head will never forget Tinker. But I am now grown more reasonable, and never make such a dreadful din but when Beau and I are together. To teach him is necessary, in order that he may take the water, and *that* is necessary in order that he may be sweet in summer. Farewell, my dearest Coz. I am, with Mrs. U.'s affections, ever thine, most truly, WM. COWPER.

To LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Jan. 19, 1788.

When I have prose enough to fill my paper, which is always the case when I write to you, I cannot find in my heart to give a third part of it to verse. Yet this I must do, or I must make my packets more costly than worshipful, by doubling the postage upon you, which I should hold to be unreasonable. See then the true reason why I did not send you that same scribblement till you desired it. The thought which naturally presents itself to me on all such occasions is this,—Is not your Cousin coming? Why are you impatient? Will it not be time enough to show her your fine things when she arrives?

Fine things indeed I have few. He who has Homer to transcribe may be contented to do little else. As when an ass, being harnessed with ropes to a sand cart, drags with hanging ear his heavy burthen, neither filling the long echoing streets with his harmonious bray, nor throwing up his heels behind, frolicksome and airy, as asses less engaged are wont to do; so I, satisfied to find myself indispensably obliged to render into the best possible English metre eight and forty Greek books, of which the two finest poems in the world consist, account it quite sufficient, if I may at last achieve that labour; and seldom allow myself those pretty little vagaries, in which I should otherwise delight, and of which, if I should live long enough, I intend hereafter to enjoy my fill.

This is the reason, my dear Cousin, if I may be

permitted to call you so in the same breath with which I have uttered this truly heroic comparison,—this is the reason why I produce at present but a few occasional poems, and the preceding reason is that which may account satisfactorily enough for my withholding the very few that I do produce. A thought sometimes strikes me before I rise; if it runs readily into verse, and I can finish it before breakfast, it is well; otherwise it dies, and is forgotten; for all the subsequent hours are devoted to Homer.

The day before yesterday, I saw for the first time Bunbury's new print, the 'Propagation of a Lie.' Mr. Throckmorton sent it for the amusement of our party. Bunbury sells humour by the yard, and is, I suppose, the first vender of it who ever did so. He cannot therefore be said to have humour without measure (pardon a pun, my dear, from a man who has not made one before these forty years), though he may certainly be said to be immeasurably droll.

The original though is good, and the exemplification of it, in those very expressive figures, admirable. A poem on the same subject, displaying all that is displayed in those attitudes, and in those features (for faces they can hardly be called) would be most excellent. The affinity of the two arts, viz. verse and painting, has been observed; possibly the happiest illustration of it would be found, if some poet would ally himself to some draftsman, as Bunbury, and undertake to write everything he should draw. Then let a musician be admitted of the party. He should compose the said poem, adapting notes to it exactly accommodated to the theme; so should the sister arts be proved to be indeed sisters, and the world die of laughing.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Feb. 1, 1788.

. . . What I said concerning Homer, my dear, was spoken, or rather written, merely under the influence of a certain jocularity that I felt at that moment. I

am in reality so far from thinking myself an ass, and my translation a sand-cart, that I rather seem, in my own account of the matter, one of those flaming steeds harnessed to the chariot of Apollo, of which we read in the works of the ancients. I have lately, I know not how, acquired a certain superiority to myself in this business, and in this last revisal have elevated the expression to a degree far surpassing its former boast. A few evenings since I had an opportunity to try how far I might venture to expect such success of my labours as can alone repay them, by reading the first book of my *Iliad* to a friend of ours. He dined with you once at Olney. His name is Greatheed, a man of letters and of taste. He dined with us, and the evening proving dark and dirty, we persuaded him to take a bed. I entertained him as I tell you. He heard me with great attention, and with evident symptoms of the highest satisfaction, which, when I had finished the exhibition, he put out of all doubt by expressions which I cannot repeat. Only this he said to Mrs. Unwin while I was in another room, that he had never entered into the spirit of Homer before, nor had anything like a due conception of his manner. This I have said, knowing that it will please you, and will now say no more.

Adieu !—my dear, will you never speak of coming to Weston more? W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Feb. 7, 1788.

My dearest Cousin— . . . Mr. Bull, the lame curate, having been lately preferred to a living, another was of course wanted to supply his place. By the recommendation of Mr. Romaine, a Mr. C—— came down. He lodges at Mr. Socket's in this village, and Mr. Socket lives in the small house to which you had once conceived a liking. Our lakuey is also clerk of the parish. C—— a day or two after his arrival had a corpse to bury at Weston. Having occasion to consult with the clerk concerning this matter, he sought him

in our kitchen. Samuel entered the study to inform us that there was a clergyman without: he was accordingly invited in, and in he came. We had but lately dined; the wine was on the table, and he drank three glasses while the corpse in question was getting ready for its last journey. The moment he entered the room, I felt myself incurably prejudiced against him: his features, his figure, his address, and all that he uttered, confirmed that prejudice, and I determined, having once seen him, to see him no more. Two days after he overtook me in the village. 'Your humble servant, Mr. Cowper! a fine morning, sir, for a walk. I had liked to have called on you yesterday morning to tell you that I had become your near neighbour. I live at Mr. Socket's.' I answered without looking at him, as drily as possibly,—'Are you come to stay any time in the country?'—He believed he was.—'Which way,' I replied, 'are you going? to Olney?'—'Yes.'—'I am going to Mr. Throckmorton's garden, and I wish you a good day, sir.'—I was in fact going to Olney myself, but this rencontre gave me such a violent twist another way that I found it impossible to recover that direction, and accordingly there we parted. All this I related at the Hall the next time we dined there, describing also my apprehensions and distress lest, whether I would or not, I should be obliged to have intercourse with a man to me so perfectly disagreeable. A good deal of laugh and merriment ensued, and there for that time it ended. The following Sunday, in the evening, I received a note to this purport: 'Mr. C——'s compliments,' etc. Understanding that my friends at the Hall were to dine with me the next day, he took the liberty to invite himself to eat a bit of mutton with me, being sure that I should be happy to introduce him. Having read the note, I threw it to Mrs. Unwin. 'There,' said I, 'take that and read it; then tell me if it be not an effort of impudence the most extraordinary you ever heard of.' I expected some such push from the man; I knew he was equal to it. She read it, and we were both of a

mind. I sat down to my desk, and with a good deal of emotion gave it just such an answer as it would have deserved had it been genuine. But having heard by accident in the morning that he spells his name with a C, and observing in the note that it was spelt with a K, a suspicion struck me that it was a fiction. I looked at it more attentively and perceived that it was directed by Mrs. Throck. The inside I found afterwards was written by her brother George. This served us with another laugh on the subject, and I have hardly seen, and never spoken to, Mr. C—— since. So, my dear, *that's the little story I promised you.*

Mr. Bull called here this morning: from him I learn what follows concerning P——. He waited on the Bishop of London, like a blundering ignoramus as he is, without his canonicals. The Bishop was highly displeased, as he had cause to be; and having pretty significantly given him to know it, addressed himself to his chaplain with tokens of equal displeasure, enjoining him never more to admit a clergyman to him in such attire. To pay this visit he made a journey from Clapham to town on horseback. His horse he left at an inn on the Lambeth side of Westminster Bridge. Thence he proceeded to the Bishop's, and from the Bishop's to Mr. Scott. Having finished this last visit he begged Mr. Scott's company to the inn where he had left his horse, which he said was at the foot of *London* Bridge. Thither they went, but neither the inn nor the horse were there. Then says P——, it must be at Blackfriars' Bridge that I left it. Thither also they went, but to as little purpose. Luckily for him there was but one more bridge, and there they found it. To make the poor youth amends for all these misadventures, it so happened that the incumbent, his predecessor, died before the crops of last year were reaped. The whole profits of that year, by consequence, go into P.'s pocket, which was never so stuffed before.

Good night, my dearest Coz. Mrs. Unwin's love attends you.—Affectionately yours, Wm. Cowper.

To Clotworthy Rowley, Esq.

Weston Underwood, Feb. 21, 1783.

My dear Rowley—I have not, since I saw you, seen the face of any man whom I knew while you and I were neighbours in the Temple. From the Temple I went to St. Alban's, thence to Cambridge, thence to Huntingdon, thence to Olney, thence hither. At Huntingdon I formed a connexion with a most valuable family of the name of Unwin, from which family I have never since been divided. The father of it is dead; his only son is dead; the daughter is married and gone northward; Mrs. Unwin and I live together. We dwell in a neat and comfortable abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, where, if your Hibernian engagements would permit, I should be happy to receive you. We have one family here, and only one, with which we much associate. They are Throckmortons, descendants of Sir Nicholas of that name, young persons, but sensible, accomplished, and friendly in the highest degree. What sort of scenery lies around us I have already told you in verse; there is no need, therefore, to do it in prose. I will only add to its printed eulogium, that it affords opportunity of walking at all seasons, abounding with beautiful grass-grounds, which encompass our village on all sides to a considerable distance. These grounds are skirted by woods of great extent, belonging principally to our neighbours above mentioned. I, who love walking, and who always hated riding, who am fond of some society, but never had spirits that would endure a great deal, could not, as you perceive, be better situated. Within a few miles of us, both to the east and west, there are other families with whom we mix occasionally; but keeping no carriage of any sort, I cannot reach them often. Lady Hesketh (widow of Sir Thomas, whose name, at least, you remember), spends part of the year with us, during which time I have the means of conveyance, which else are not at my command.

So much for my situation. Now, what am I doing? Translating Homer. Is not this, you will say, *actum agere?* But if you think again, you will find that it is not. At least, for my own part, I can assure you that I have never seen him translated yet, except in the Dog-Latin, which you remember to have applied to for illumination when you were a school boy. We are strange creatures, my little friend; everything that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin. Not much less than thirty years since, Alston and I read Homer through together. We compared Pope with his original all the way. The result was a discovery, that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute, as a taste for Homer. After the publication of my last volume, I found myself without employment. Employment is essential to me; I have neither health nor spirits without it. After some time, the recollection of what had passed between Alston and myself in the course of this business struck me forcibly; I remembered how we had been disgusted; how often we had sought the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representative, and had found instead of them, puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position. Neither did I forget how often we were on the point of burning Pope, as we burnt Bertram Montfitchet[1] in your chambers. I laid a Homer before me. I translated a few lines into blank verse; the day following a few more; and proceeding thus till I had finished the first book, was convinced that I could render an acceptable service to the literary world, should I be favoured with health to enable me to translate the whole. The *Iliad* I translated without interruption. That done, I published Proposals for a subscription, and can boast of a very good one. Soon after, I was taken ill, and

[1] Some liquid has fallen upon the letter, and completely obliterated all but the initial and last syllable of this word. But the *Monthly Review* for April, 1761, notices *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfitchet, Esq., written by himself*, as an humble imitation of *Tristram Shandy*.—Southey's note.

was hindered near a twelvemonth. But I have now resumed the work, and have proceeded in it as far as the end of the fifteenth *Iliad*, altering and amending my first copy with all the diligence I am master of. For this I will be answerable, that it shall be found a close translation: in that respect, as faithful as our language, not always a match for the Greek, will give me leave to make it. For its other qualifications, I must refer myself to the judgement of the public, when it shall appear. Thus I have fulfilled my promise, and have told you not only how I am at present occupied, but how I am likely to be for some time to come. The *Odyssey* I have not yet touched. I need not, I am confident, use any extraordinary arts of persuasion to secure to myself your influence, as far as it extends. If you mention that there is such a work on the anvil in this country, in yours perhaps you will meet somebody now and then not disinclined to favour it. I would order you a parcel of printed proposals, if I knew how to send it. But they are not indispensably necessary. The terms are, two large volumes, quarto, royal paper, three guineas; common, two.

I rejoice that you have a post, which, though less lucrative than the labours of it deserve, is yet highly honourable, and so far worthy of you. Adieu, my dear Rowley. May peace and prosperity be your portion. —Yours, very affectionately, WM. COWPER.

To LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 3, 1788.

One day last week, Mrs. Unwin and I, having taken our morning walk and returning homeward through the wilderness, met the Throckmortons. A minute after we had met them, we heard the cry of hounds at no great distance, and mounting the broad stump of an elm which had been felled, and by the aid of which we were enabled to look over the wall, we saw them. They were all at that time in our orchard; presently we heard a terrier, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton, which you

may remember by the name of Fury, yelping with much vehemence, and saw her running through the thickets within a few yards of us at her utmost speed, as if in pursuit of something which we doubted not was the fox. Before we could reach the other end of the wilderness, the hounds entered also; and when we arrived at the gate which opens into the grove, there we found the whole weary cavalcade assembled. The huntsman dismounting, begged leave to follow his hounds on foot, for he was sure, he said, that they had killed him: a conclusion which I suppose he drew from their profound silence. He was accordingly admitted, and with a sagacity that would not have dishonoured the best hound in the world, pursuing precisely the same track which the fox and the dogs had taken, though he had never had a glimpse of either after their first entrance through the rails, arrived where he found the slaughtered prey. He soon produced dead reynard, and rejoined us in the grove with all his dogs about him. Having an opportunity to see a ceremony, which I was pretty sure would never fall in my way again, I determined to stay and to notice all that passed with the most minute attention. The huntsman having by the aid of a pitch-fork lodged reynard on the arm of an elm, at the height of about nine feet from the ground, there left him for a considerable time. The gentlemen sat on their horses contemplating the fox, for which they had toiled so hard, and the hounds assembled at the foot of the tree, with faces not less expressive of the most rational delight, contemplated the same object. The huntsman remounted; cut off a foot, and threw it to the hounds; —one of them swallowed it whole like a bolus. He then once more alighted, and drawing down the fox by the hinder legs, desired the people, who were by this time rather numerous, to open a lane for him to the right and left. He was instantly obeyed, when throwing the fox to the distance of some yards, and screaming like a fiend, 'tear him to pieces'—at least six times repeatedly, he consigned him over absolutely to the pack, who in a few minutes devoured him completely

Thus, my dear, as Virgil says, what none of the gods could have ventured to promise me, time itself, pursuing its accustomed course, has of its own accord presented me with. I have been in at the death of a fox, and you now know as much of the matter as I, who am as well informed as any sportsman in England.—Yours,

W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston Underwood, March 3, 1788.

. . . There is nothing in my story that can possibly be worth your knowledge; yet, lest I should seem to treat you with a reserve which, at your hands, I have not experienced, such as it is, I will relate it.—I was bred to the law; a profession to which I was never much inclined, and in which I engaged rather because I was desirous to gratify a most indulgent father, than because I had any hopes of success in it myself. I spent twelve years in the Temple, where I made no progress in that science, to cultivate which I was sent thither. During this time my father died. Not long after him, died my mother-in-law; and at the expiration of it, a melancholy seized me, which obliged me to quit London, and consequently to renounce the bar. I lived some time at St. Albans. After having suffered in that place long and extreme affliction, the storm was suddenly dispelled, and the same day-spring from on high which has arisen upon you, arose on me also. I spent eight years in the enjoyment of it; and have, ever since the expiration of these eight years, been occasionally the prey of the same melancholy as at first. In the depths of it I wrote *The Task*, and the volume which preceded it; and in the same deeps am now translating Homer. But to return to St. Albans. I abode there a year and half. Thence I went to Cambridge, where I spent a short time with my brother, in whose neighbourhood I determined, if possible, to pass the remainder of my days. He soon found a lodging for me at Huntingdon. At that place I had not resided long, when I was led to an intimate connexion with a family of the name of

Unwin. I soon quitted my lodging, and took up my abode with them. I had not lived long under their roof, when Mr. Unwin, as he was riding one Sunday morning to his cure at Gravely, was thrown from his horse; of which fall he died. Mrs. Unwin having the same views of the gospel as myself, and being desirous of attending a purer ministration of it than was to be found at Huntingdon, removed to Olney, where Mr. Newton was at that time the preacher, and I with her. There we continued till Mr. Newton, whose family was the only one in the place with which we could have a connexion, and with whom we lived always on the most intimate terms, left it. After his departure, finding the situation no longer desirable, and our house threatening to fall upon our heads, we removed hither. Here we have a good house, in a most beautiful village, and, for the greatest part of the year, a most agreeable neighbourhood. Like you, Madam, I stay much at home, and have not travelled twenty miles from this place and its environs, more than once these twenty years.

All this I have written, not for the singularity of the matter, as you will perceive, but partly for the reason which I gave at the outset, and partly that, seeing we are become correspondents, we may know as much of each other as we can, and that as soon as possible.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, March 12, 1788.

. . . We shall now soon lose our neighbours at the Hall. We shall truly miss them, and long for their return. Mr. Throckmorton said to me last night, with sparkling eyes, and a face expressive of the highest pleasure—'We compared you this morning with Pope; we read your fourth *Iliad* and his, and I verily think we shall beat him. He has many superfluous lines, and does not interest one. When I read your translation, I am deeply affected. I see plainly your advantage, and am convinced that Pope spoiled all by attempting the

work in rhyme.' His brother George, who is my most active amanuensis, and who indeed first introduced the subject, seconded all he said. More would have passed, but Mrs. Throckmorton having seated herself at the harpsichord, and for my amusement merely, my attention was of course turned to her. The new vicar of Olney is arrived, and we have exchanged visits. He is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much. A treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value. W. C.

To Mrs. Hill

March 17, 1788.

My dear Madam—A thousand thanks to you for your obliging and most acceptable present, which I received safe this evening. Had you known my occasions, you could not possibly have timed it more exactly. The Throckmorton family, who live in our neighbourhood, and who sometimes take a dinner with us, were, by engagement made with them two or three days ago, appointed to dine with us just at the time when your turkey will be in perfection. A turkey from Wargrave, the residence of my friend, and a turkey, as I conclude, of your breeding, stands a fair chance, in my account, to excel all other turkeys; and the ham, its companion, will be no less welcome.

I shall be happy to hear that my friend Joseph has recovered entirely from his late indisposition, which I was informed was gout; a distemper which, however painful in itself, brings at least some comfort with it, both for the patient and those who love him, the hope of length of days, and an exemption from numerous other evils. I wish him just so much of it as may serve for a confirmation of this hope, and not one twinge more.

Your husband, my dear Madam, told me, some time since, that a certain library of mine, concerning which I have heard no other tidings these five and twenty years, is still in being. Hue and cry have been made after it in Old Palace Yard, but hitherto in vain. If

he can inform a bookless student in what region or in what nook his long-lost volumes may be found, he will render me an important service.

I am likely to be furnished soon with shelves, which my cousin of New Norfolk Street is about to send me; but furniture for these shelves I shall not presently procure, unless by recovering my stray authors. I am not young enough to think of making a new collection, and shall probably possess myself of few books hereafter but such as I may put forth myself, which cost me nothing but what I can better spare than money—time and consideration.

I beg, my dear Madam, that you will give my love to my friend, and believe me, with the warmest sense of his and your kindness, Your most obliged and affectionate WM. COWPER.

To SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

Weston, March 29, 1788.

My dear Friend—I rejoice that you have so successfully performed so long a journey without the aid of hoofs or wheels. I do not know that a journey on foot exposes a man to more disasters than a carriage or a horse; perhaps it may be the safer way of travelling, but the novelty of it impressed me with some anxiety on your account.

It seems almost incredible to myself that my company should be at all desirable to you, or to any man. I know so little of the world as it goes at present, and labour generally under such a depression of spirits, especially at those times when I could wish to be most cheerful, that my own share in every conversation appears to me to be the most insipid thing imaginable. But you say you found it otherwise, and I will not for my own sake doubt your sincerity: *de gustibus non est disputandum*, and since such is yours, I shall leave you in quiet possession of it, wishing indeed both its continuance and increase. I shall not find a properer place in which to say, accept of Mrs. Unwin's acknow-

ledgements, as well as mine, for the kindness of your expressions on this subject, and be assured of an undissembling welcome at all times, when it shall suit you to give us your company at Weston. As to her, she is one of the sincerest of the human race, and if she receives you with the appearance of pleasure, it is because she feels it. Her behaviour on such occasions is with her an affair of conscience, and she dares no more look a falsehood than utter one. . . .

If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands, they are probably mine. It must be an honour to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble. I fear, however, that the attempt will fail. The tidings which have lately reached me from London concerning it, are not the most encouraging. While the matter slept, or was but slightly adverted to, the English only had their share of shame in common with other nations on account of it. But since it has been canvassed and searched to the bottom—since the public attention has been riveted to the horrible scheme—we can no longer plead either that we did not know it, or did not think of it. Woe be to us, if we refuse the poor captives the redress to which they have so clear a right, and prove ourselves in the sight of God and men indifferent to all considerations but those of gain. Adieu, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

April 19, 1788.

My dear Friend— . . . The vicarage at Olney begins once more to assume a comfortable aspect. Our new neighbours there are of a character exactly suited to our wish, conversable, peaceable, amiable. We drank tea there yesterday; the first opportunity we have had of doing so; they, having waived all unnecessary ceremonials, drank tea with us the day before. I had made several calls on them at noon, and Mr. Bean several here in the evening; but dirty ways, high winds, rain, or snow had always interposed to prevent a meeting

between the ladies. Mr. Bean has made a notable journey to Oxford, in company with Thomas Bull. It is hardly fair to anticipate him in the account which he will doubtless give you of it himself, neither have I room to say much about it. I will only just mention, that having but one horse between them, they availed themselves of him in every possible way. Mr. Bean having walked till he could walk no longer, mounted behind, but finding himself incommoded in the straddle that the horse's hips required, changed places with Mr. Bull; he thenceforth rode behind, in the side-saddle fashion, with both legs on a side, and thus they proceeded till they came near to Oxford. . . .—Affectionately and truly yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, May 6, 1788.

My dearest Cousin—You ask me how I like Smollett's *Don Quixote*? I answer, well,—perhaps better than any body's; but having no skill in the original, some diffidence becomes me. That is to say, I do not know whether I *ought* to prefer it or not. Yet there is so little deviation from other versions of it which I have seen, that I do not much hesitate. It has made me laugh I know immoderately, and in such a case *ça suffit*.

A thousand thanks, my dear, for the new convenience in the way of stowage which you are so kind as to intend me. There is nothing in which I am so deficient as repositories for letters, papers, and litter of all sorts. Your last present has helped me somewhat; but not with respect to such things as require lock and key, which are numerous. A box therefore so secured will be to me an invaluable acquisition. And since you leave me to my option, what shall be the size thereof, I of course prefer a folio. On the back of the book-seeming box some artist, expert in these matters, may inscribe these words,

Collectanea curiosa.

The English of which is, a collection of curiosities. A title which I prefer to all others, because if I live, I shall take care that the box shall merit it; and because it will operate as an incentive to open that, which being locked cannot be opened. For in these cases the greater the balk, the more wit is discovered by the ingenious contriver of it, viz. myself. . . .

When people are intimate, we say they are as great as two inkle-weavers, on which expression I have to remark in the first place, that the word *great* is here used in a sense which the corresponding term has not, so far as I know, in any other language,—and secondly, that inkle-weavers contract intimacies with each other sooner than other people, on account of their juxtaposition in weaving of inkle. Hence it is that Mr. Gregson and I emulate those happy weavers in the closeness of our connexion. We live near to each other, and while the Hall is empty are each other's only extraforaneous comfort.—Most truly thine, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Weston, May 8, 1788.

Alas! my library!—I must now give it up for a lost thing for ever. The only consolation belonging to the circumstance is, or seems to be, that no such loss did ever befall any other man, or can ever befall me again. As far as books are concerned I am

Totus teres atque rotundus,

and may set fortune at defiance. The books which had been my father's had most of them his arms on the inside cover, but the rest no mark, neither his name nor mine. I could mourn for them like Sancho for his Dapple, but it would avail me nothing.

You will oblige me much by sending me *Crazy Kate*. A gentleman last winter promised me both her and the *Lacemaker*, but he went to London, that place in which, as in the grave, 'all things are forgotten,' and I have never seen either of them.

I begin to find some prospect of a conclusion, of the *Iliad* at least, now opening upon me, having reached the eighteenth book. Your letter found me yesterday in the very fact of dispersing the whole host of Troy by the voice only of Achilles. There is nothing extravagant in the idea, for you have witnessed a similar effect attending even such a voice as mine at midnight, from a garret window, on the dogs of a whole parish, whom I have put to flight in a moment. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, May 12, 1788.

It is probable, my dearest Coz, that I shall not be able to write much, but as much as I can I will. The time between rising and breakfast is all that I can at present find, and this morning I lay longer than usual.

In the style of the lady's note to you I can easily perceive a smatch of her character. Neither men nor women write with such neatness of expression, who have not given a good deal of attention to language, and qualified themselves by study. At the same time it gave me much more pleasure to observe that my Coz, though not standing on the pinnacle of renown quite so elevated as that which lifts Mrs. Montagu to the clouds, falls in no degree short of her in this particular; so that should she make you a member of her academy, she will do it honour. Suspect me not of flattering you, for I abhor the thought; neither *will* you suspect it. Recollect that it is an invariable rule with me, never to pay compliments to those I love.

Two days, *en suite,* I have walked to Gayhurst: a longer journey than I have walked on foot these seventeen years. The first day I went alone, designing merely to make the experiment, and choosing to be at liberty to return at whatsoever point of my pilgrimage I should find myself fatigued. For I was not without suspicion that years, and some other things no less injurious than years, viz. melancholy and distress of mind, might by this time have unfitted me for such

achievements. But I found it otherwise. I reached the church, which stands, as you know, in the garden, in fifty-five minutes, and returned in ditto time to Weston. The next day I took the same walk with Mr. Powley, having a desire to show him the prettiest place in the country. I not only performed these two excursions without injury to my health, but have by means of them gained indisputable proof that my ambulatory faculty is not yet impaired; a discovery which, considering that to my feet alone I am likely, as I have ever been, to be indebted always for my transportation from place to place, I find very delectable.

You will find in the *Gentleman's Magazine* a sonnet, addressed to Henry Cowper, signed T. H. I am the writer of it. No creature knows this but yourself; you will make what use of the intelligence you shall see good.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, May 19, 1788.

True, as you say, my Coz, praise not sounded forth is lost, and the subject of it not at all advantaged. But the question is, shall we publish our eulogium on Mrs. Montagu in a newspaper or in the *Gentleman's Magazine?* Let us consider the matter; a newspaper perhaps has more readers than Mr. Urban, yet Mr. Urban has many, and a majority of them are literary men. No single newspaper possibly is read by so many of the literati as the publications of Mr. Urban,—not to mention that he is perused by multitudes of blockheads besides. Again a newspaper dies with the day, and its contents in general die with it. Not so the *Gentleman's Magazine.* There are multitudes who perpetuate the long series of his labours, who deliver them down to posterity; one generation consigns them over to another, and they are consequently immortal. For these reasons, therefore, I deem a compliment paid in a magazine twice as good as the same compliment would be, paid in a newspaper; especially considering that there is at least a chance that some daily paper may

enrich itself with a copy of said compliment, stealing it from the *Magazine*, a practice not unfrequent. Thus far I have considered only Mrs. Montagu's interest in the affair; but I do not mean altogether to overlook my own concern in it. One good turn deserves another; Mr. Urban was not sparing either of his labours or his commendations in giving an account of *The Task*. On the contrary, he has bestowed on it a larger portion of both than any of his brother reviewers. I account myself, therefore, in some sort bound to give him now and then a proof that I am not insensible of the obligation, by sending him such scraps as the more weighty business of translating Homer will permit me to produce.

All these reasons maturely weighed, a decision seems to result from them in favour of the *Magazine*. But after all, I refer the whole to your arbitration. If in your next you should tell me that you are of my mind, I will transmit a copy immediately to Mr. Nichols, informing him at the same time that they are by the author of *The Task*. Shouldst thou differ from me, thou wilt then do well to send them thyself to any newspaper which thou approvest most.

It is generally a rule with me in writing to you, to forget what is most important. Accordingly, I forgot to tell you of Lord Cowper's kindness. I was not aware of my obligations to Henry; neither did I at all suspect that he had given his Lordship a jog on the occasion. Of course, when I answered his letter, I made him no acknowledgement on that behalf. I therefore entreat thee to be proxy for me, and when you see him next, to thank him heartily on my part for his friendly and seasonable intercession.

I also forgot to tell thee, that in a squabble that has fallen out between Maurice Smith and Mrs. Marriot of the Swan, concerning the post office, viz. who should have the management of it, the new plan of a daily post has dropped to the ground, and we now have our letters only three times in the week, as usual.

I beg that you will give my love to Mrs. Frog, and

tell her it is time she were gone to Bucklands. According to my reckoning, which I know to be very exact, she has already stayed her allotted time in London, where if she still continues frisking about, heedless how time goes, and is after all to take a frisk to Bucklands also, I shall be glad to know when we are likely to see her at the Hall again? It is true that northernly winds have blown ever since she left us, but they have not prevented the most exuberant show of blossoms that ever was seen, nor the singing of nightingales in every hedge. Ah, my Cousin, thou hast lost all these luxuries too, but not by choice, thine is an absence of necessity. The Wilderness is now in all its beauty: I would that thou wert here to enjoy it. Our guests leave us to-morrow. Fare thee well. Thanks for the two lists of subscribers, and for Mr. Vickery's most admirable puff.—Yours, my dearest, ever,

Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

May 24, 1788.

My dear Friend—For two excellent prints I return you my sincere acknowledegments. I cannot say that poor 'Kate' resembles much the original, who was neither so young nor so handsome as the pencil has represented her; but she was a figure well suited to the account given of her in *The Task*, and has a face exceedingly expressive of despairing melancholy. The 'Lace-maker' is accidentally a good likeness of a young woman, once our neighbour, who was hardly less handsome than the picture twenty years ago; but the loss of one husband, and the acquisition of another, have since that time impaired her much; yet she might still be supposed to have sat to the artist. . . .

I am now in the nineteenth book of the *Iliad*, and on the point of displaying such feats of heroism performed by Achilles, as make all other achievements trivial. I may well exclaim, O! for a muse of fire! especially having not only a great host to cope with, but a great river also; much, however, may be done, when Homer

leads the way. I should not have chosen to have been the original author of such a business, even though all the nine had stood at my elbow. Time has wonderful effects. We admire that in an ancient, for which we should send a modern bard to Bedlam.

I saw at Mr. C——'s a great curiosity; an antique bust of Paris in Parian marble. You will conclude that it interested me exceedingly. I pleased myself with supposing that it once stood in Helen's chamber. It was in fact brought from the Levant, and though not well mended (for it had suffered much by time) is an admirable performance. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 3, 1788.

My dearest Cousin—The excessive heat of these few last days was indeed oppressive; but excepting the languor that it occasioned both in my mind and body, it was far from being prejudicial to me. It opened ten thousand pores, by which as many mischiefs, the effects of long obstruction, began to breathe themselves forth abundantly. Then came an east wind, baneful to me at all times, but following so closely such a sultry season, uncommonly obnoxious. To speak in the seaman's phrase, not entirely strange to you, *I was taken all aback*; and the humours which would have escaped, if old Eurus would have given them leave, finding every door shut, have fallen into my eyes. But in a country like this, poor miserable mortals must be content to suffer all that sudden and violent changes can inflict; and if they are quit for about half the plagues that Caliban calls down on Prospero, they may say we are well off, and dance for joy, if the rheumatism or cramp will let them.

Did you ever see an advertisement by one Fowle, a dancing-master of Newport Pagnel? If not, I will contrive to send it to you for your amusement. It is the most extravagantly ludicrous affair of the kind I ever saw The author of it had the good hap to be crazed,

or he had never produced anything half so clever; for you will ever observe, that they who are said to have lost their wits, have more than other people. It is therefore only a slander, with which envy prompts the malignity of persons in their senses to asperse wittier than themselves. But there are countries in the world, where the mad have justice done them, where they are revered as the subjects of inspiration, and consulted as oracles. Poor Fowle would have made a figure there.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 15, 1788.

Although I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion, yet, not hearing from you, I began to be uneasy on your account, and to fear that your health might have suffered by the fatigue, both of body and spirits, that you must have undergone, till a letter that reached me yesterday from the General set my heart at rest, so far as that cause of anxiety was in question. He speaks of my uncle[1] in the tenderest terms, such as show how truly sensible he was of the amiableness and excellence of his character and how deeply he regrets his loss. We have indeed lost one who has not left his like in the present generation of our family, and whose equal in all respects, no future of it will probably produce. My memory retains so perfect an impression of him, that, had I been painter instead of poet, I could from those faithful traces have perpetuated his face and form with the most minute exactness; and this I the rather wonder at because some with whom I was equally conversant five-and-twenty years ago, have almost faded out of all recollection with me. But he made an impression not soon to be effaced, and was in figure, in temper, and manner, and in numerous other respects, such as I shall never behold again. I often think what a joyful interview there has been between him and some of his contemporaries, who went before him.

[1] Ashley Cowper, Lady Hesketh's father, who had just died.

The truth of the matter is, my dear, that they are the happy ones, and that we shall never be such ourselves till we have joined the party. Can there be anything so worthy of our warmest wishes as to enter on an eternal, unchangeable state, in blessed fellowship and communion with those whose society we valued most, and for the best reasons, while they continued with us? A few steps more through a vain, foolish world, and this happiness will be yours. But be not hasty, my dear, to accomplish thy journey! For of all that live thou art one whom I can least spare; for thou also art one who shall not leave thy equal behind thee.

W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston Underwood, June 19, 1788.

My dear Madam—You must think me a tardy correspondent, unless you have had charity enough for me to suppose that I have met with other hindrances than those of indolence and inattention. With these I cannot charge myself, for I am never idle by choice; and inattentive to you I certainly have not been; but, on the contrary, can safely affirm that every day I have thought on you. My silence has been occasioned by a malady to which I have all my life been subject—an inflammation of the eyes. The last sudden change of weather, from excessive heat to a wintry degree of cold, occasioned it, and at the same time gave me a pinch of the rheumatic kind; from both which disorders I have but just recovered. I do not suppose that our climate has been much altered since the days of our forefathers, the Picts; but certainly the human constitution in this country has been altered much. Inured as we are from our cradles to every vicissitude in a climate more various than any other, and in possession of all that modern refinement has been able to contrive for our security, we are yet as subject to blights as the tenderest blossoms of spring; and are so well admonished of every change in the atmosphere by our bodily feelings, as hardly to have any need of a weather-glass

to mark them. For this we are, no doubt, indebted to the multitude of our accommodations; for it was not possible to retain the hardiness that originally belonged to our race, under the delicate management to which for many ages we have now been accustomed. I can hardly doubt that a bull-dog or a game-cock might be made just as susceptible of injuries from weather as myself, were he dieted and in all respects accommodated as I am. Or if the project did not succeed in the first instance (for we ourselves did not become what we are at once), in process of time, however, and in a course of many generations it would certainly take effect. Let such a dog be fed in his infancy with pap, Naples biscuit, and boiled chicken; let him be wrapped in flannel at night, sleep on a good feather-bed, and ride out in a coach for an airing; and if his posterity do not become slight-limbed, puny, and valetudinarian, it will be a wonder. Thus our parents, and their parents, and the parents of both were managed; and thus ourselves; and the consequence is, that instead of being weather-proof, even without clothing, furs and flannels are not warm enough to defend us. It is observable, however, that though we have by these means lost much of our pristine vigour, our days are not the fewer. We live as long as those whom, on account of the sturdiness of their frame, the poets supposed to have been the progeny of oaks. Perhaps too they had little feeling, and for that reason also might be imagined to be so descended: for a very robust athletic habit seems inconsistent with much sensibility. But sensibility is the *sine quâ non* of real happiness. If, therefore, our lives have not been shortened, and if our feelings have been rendered more exquisite as our habit of body has become more delicate, on the whole, perhaps, we have no cause to complain, but are rather gainers by our degeneracy.

Do you consider what you do, when you ask one poet his opinion of another? Yet I think I can give you an honest answer to your question, and without the least wish to nibble. Thomson was admirable in description;

but it always seemed to me that there was somewhat of affectation in his style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonized. I could wish too, with Dr. Johnson, that he had confined himself to this country; for when he describes what he never saw, one is forced to read him with some allowance for possible misrepresentation. He was, however, a true poet, and his lasting fame has proved it. Believe me, my dear Madam, with my best respects to Mr. King, most truly yours,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 27, 1788

For the sake of a longer visit, my dearest Coz, I can be well content to wait. The country, this country at least, is pleasant at all times, and when winter is come, or near at hand, we shall have the better chance for being snug. I know your passion for retirement indeed, or for what we call *deedy* retirement, and the F——s intending to return to Bath with their mother, when her visit at the Hall is over, you will then find here exactly the retirement in question. I have made in the orchard the best winter-walk in all the parish, sheltered from the east, and from the north-east, and open to the sun, except at his rising, all the day. Then we will have Homer and *Don Quixote*: and then we will have saunter and chat, and one laugh more before we die. Our Orchard is alive with creatures of all kinds; poultry of every denomination swarms in it, and pigs, the drollest in the world! . . .

I must tell you a feat of my dog Beau. Walking by the river side, I observed some water-lilies floating at a little distance from the bank. They are a large white flower, with an orange-coloured eye, very beautiful. I had a desire to gather one, and, having your long cane in my hand, by the help of it endeavoured to bring one of them within my reach. But the attempt proved vain, and I walked forward. Beau had all the while observed me attentively. Returning soon after toward the same place, I observed him plunge into the

river, while I was about forty yards distance from him; and, when I had nearly reached the spot, he swam to land with a lily in his mouth, which he came and laid at my foot. . . .—Yours, my dear, most truly,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, July 5, 1788.

Beau's performance was exactly such as I have represented it, without any embellishment. I may now add, that the next time we walked to the same place together, he repeated it. With respect to his diet, it is always of the most salutary kind: lights he never eats, and liver, having observed that it makes him sick, we never give him. Bread he eats in abundance, and it is the only thing for which he begs with much importunity. He is regularly combed, and his ears, which are remarkably handsome, are my own particular care. They gather burrs while he threads all the thickets in his way, from which I deliver them myself as soon as we get home. But having taught him to take the water, and even to delight in it, I never give him a forced washing, lest he should contract a hydrophobia, and refuse the river. I have observed, too, that dogs often washed get rheumatisms, because they do not dry themselves by exercise, but lie down in their damp coats, which is hurtful to everything but a highlander. . . .—Ever yours, my dear, Wm. Cowper.

P.S.—I forgot to tell you that my watch is no repeater, neither good for much in its kind. It was made at Cambridge for my brother, and brought home the day after his death—a metal one, for which I paid six guineas. It has been one of my chief employments to wish for a better.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

July 6, 1788.

My dear Friend—'Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear' have compelled me to draw on you for the

sum of twenty pounds, payable to John Higgins, Esq., or order. The draft bears date July 5th.—You will excuse my giving you this trouble, in consideration that I am a poet, and can consequently draw for money much easier than I can earn it.

I heard of you a few days since, from Walter Bagot, who called here and told me that you were gone, I think, into Rutlandshire, to settle the accounts of a large estate unliquidated many years. Intricacies, that would turn my brains, are play to you. But I give you joy of a long vacation at hand, when I suppose that even you will find it pleasant, if not to be idle, at least not to be hemmed around by business.—Yours ever, WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, July 28, 1788.

It is in vain that you tell me you have no talent at description, while in fact you describe better than any body. You have given me a most complete idea of your mansion and its situation; and I doubt not that with your letter in my hand by way of map, could I be set down on the spot in a moment, I should find myself qualified to take my walks and my pastime in whatever quarter of your paradise it should please me the most to visit. We also, as you know, have scenes at Weston worthy of description; but because you know them well, I will only say that one of them has, within these few days, been much improved; I mean the lime walk. By the help of the axe and the woodbill, which have of late been constantly employed in cutting out all straggling branches that intercepted the arch, Mr. Throckmorton has now defined it with such exactness, that no cathedral in the world can show one of more magnificence or beauty. I bless myself that I live so near it; for were it distant several miles, it would be well worth while to visit it, merely as an object of taste; not to mention the refreshment of such a gloom both to the eyes and spirits. And these are the things which our modern improvers of parks

and pleasure grounds have displaced without mercy, because, forsooth, they are rectilinear! It is a wonder they do not quarrel with the sunbeams for the same reason.

Have you seen the account of Five hundred celebrated authors now living? I am one of them; but stand charged with the high crime and misdemeanour of totally neglecting method; an accusation which, if the gentleman would take the pains to read me, he would find sufficiently refuted. I am conscious at least of having laboured much in the arrangement of my matter, and of having given to the several parts of my book of *The Task*, as well as to each poem in the first volume, that sort of slight connexion which poetry demands; for in poetry (except professedly of the didactic kind) a logical precision would be stiff, pedantic, and ridiculous. But there is no pleasing some critics; the comfort is, that I am contented, whether they be pleased or not. At the same time, to my honour be it spoken, the chronicler of us five hundred prodigies bestows on me, for aught I know, more commendations than on any other of my confraternity. May he live to write the histories of as many thousand poets, and find me the very best among them! Amen!

I join with you, my dearest Coz, in wishing that I owned the fee simple of all the beautiful scenes around you, but such emoluments were never designed for poets. Am I not happier than ever poet was, in having thee for my cousin, and in the expectation of thy arrival here whenever Strawberry Hill shall lose thee?—Ever thine, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, August 9, 1788.

The Newtons are still here, and continue with us I believe until the fifteenth of the month. Here is also my friend, Mr. Rose, a valuable young man, who, attracted by the effluvia of my genius, found me out in my retirement last January twelvemonth. I have

not permitted him to be idle, but have made him transcribe for me the twelfth book of the *Iliad*. He brings me the compliments of several of the literati, with whom he is acquainted in town, and tells me, that from Dr. Maclaine, whom he saw lately, he learns that my book is in the hands of sixty different persons at the Hague, who are all enchanted with it, not forgetting the said Dr. Maclaine himself, who tells him that he reads it every day, and is always the better for it. O rare we!

I have been employed this morning in composing a Latin motto for the King's clock; the embellishments of which are by Mr. Bacon. That gentleman breakfasted with us on Wednesday, having come thirty-seven miles out of his way on purpose to see your cousin. At his request I have done it, and have made two: he will choose that which liketh him best. Mr. Bacon is a most excellent man, and a most agreeable companion: I would that he lived not so remote, or that he had more opportunity of travelling.

There is not, so far as I know, a syllable of the rhyming correspondence between me and my poor brother left, save and except the six lines of it quoted in yours. I *had* the whole of it, but it perished in the wreck of a thousand other things, when I left the Temple.

Breakfast calls. Adieu! W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Aug. 18, 1788.

My dear Friend—I left you with a sensible regret, alleviated only by the consideration that I shall see you again in October. I was under some concern also, lest, not being able to give you any certain directions myself, nor knowing where you might find a guide, you should wander and fatigue yourself, good walker as you are, before you could reach Northampton. Perhaps you heard me whistle just after our separation: it was to call back Beau, who was running after you

with all speed, to entreat you to return with me. For my part, I took my own time to return, and did not reach home till after one; and then so weary, that I was glad of my great chair, to the comforts of which I added a crust and a glass of rum and water, not without great occasion. Such a foot-traveller am I.

I am writing on Monday, but whether I shall finish my letter this morning depends on Mrs. Unwin's coming sooner or later down to breakfast. Something tells me that you set off to-day for Birmingham; and though it be a sort of Iricism to say here, I beseech you take care of yourself, for the day threatens great heat,—I cannot help it; the weather may be cold enough at the time when that good advice shall reach you; but be it hot, or be it cold, to a man who travels as you travel, 'take care of yourself' can never be an unseasonable caution. I am sometimes distressed on this account; for though you are young, and well made for such exploits, those very circumstances are more likely than anything to betray you into danger.

Consule quid valeant PLANTAE, quid ferre recusent.

The Newtons left us on Friday. We frequently talked about you after your departure, and everything that was spoken was to your advantage. I know they will be glad to see you in London, and perhaps when your summer and autumn rambles are over, you will afford them that pleasure. The Throckmortons are equally well disposed to you, and them also I recommend to you as a valuable connexion, the rather because you can only cultivate it at Weston.

I have not been idle since you went, having not only laboured as usual at the *Iliad*, but composed a *spick and span* new piece, called *The Dog and the Water Lily*, which you shall see when we meet again. I believe I related to you the incident which is the subject of it. I have also read most of Lavater's Aphorisms; they appear to me some of them wise, many of them whimsical, a few of them false, and not a few of them extravagant. *Nil ille medium.* If he finds in a man

the feature or quality that he approves, he deifies him; if the contrary, he is a devil. His verdict is in neither case, I suppose, a just one. W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston Underwood, Aug. 28, 1788.

My dear Madam— . . . You express some degree of wonder that I found you out to be sedentary; at least much a stayer within doors, without any sufficient data for my direction. Now if I should guess your figure and stature with equal success, you will deem me not only a poet but a conjurer. Yet in fact I have no pretensions of that sort. I have only formed a picture of you in my own imagination, as we ever do of a person of whom we think much, though we have never seen that person. Your height I conceive to be about five feet five inches, which, though it would make a short man, is yet height enough for a woman. If you insist on an inch or two more, I have no objection. You are not very fat, but somewhat inclined to be fat, and unless you allow yourself a little more air and exercise, will incur some danger of exceeding in your dimensions before you die. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to you to walk a little more, at least in your garden, and to amuse yourself occasionally with pulling up here and there a weed, for it will be an inconvenience to you to be much fatter than you are, at a time of life when your strength will be naturally on the decline. I have given you a fair complexion, a slight tinge of the rose in your cheeks, dark brown hair, and, if the fashion would give you leave to show it, an open and well-formed forehead. To all this I add a pair of eyes not quite black, but nearly approaching to that hue, and very animated. I have not absolutely determined on the shape of your nose, or the form of your mouth; but should you tell me that I have in other respects drawn a tolerable likeness, have no doubt but I can describe them too. I assure you that though I have a great desire to read him, I have never seen Lavater, nor have

availed myself in the least of any of his rules on this occasion. Ah, Madam! if with all that sensibility of yours, which exposes you to so much sorrow, and necessarily must expose you to it, in a world like this, I have had the good fortune to make you smile, I have then painted you, whether with a strong resemblance, or with none at all, to very good purpose. . . .—Most truly yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Sept. 13, 1788.

My dearest Coz—Beau seems to have objections against my writing to you this morning that are not to be overruled. He will be in my lap, licking my face, and nibbling the end of my pen. Perhaps he means to say, I beg you will give my love to her, which I therefore send you accordingly. There cannot be, this hindrance excepted, a situation more favourable to the business I have in hand than mine at this moment. Here is no noise, *save* (as the poets always express it) that of the birds hopping on their perches and playing with their wires, while the sun glimmering through the elm opposite the window falls on my desk with all the softness of moonshine. There is not a cloud in the sky, nor a leaf that moves, so that over and above the enjoyment of the purest calm, I feel a well-warranted expectation that such as the day is, it will be to its end. This is the month in which such weather is to be expected, and which is therefore welcome to me beyond all others, October excepted, which promises to bring you hither. At your coming you will probably find us, and us only, or, to speak more properly, *uzz*. The Frogs, as I told you, hop into Norfolk soon, on a visit to Lord Petre, who, beside his palace in Essex, has another in that county. All the brothers are now at the Hall, *save* the physician, who is employed in prescribing medicine to the Welsh at Cardiff. There lives he with *madame son épouse*, with an income of three hundred pounds a year,—all happiness and contentment. The mother is also here; and here is also our

uncle Gifford,—a man whom if you know you must love, and if you do not, I wish you did. But he goes this morning, and I expect every minute to see him pass my window. In volubility, variety, and earnestness of expression, he very much resembles your father, and in the sweetness of his temper too; so that though he be but a passenger, or rather a bird of passage, for his headquarters are in France, and he only flits occasionally to England, he has much engaged my affections. I walked with him yesterday on a visit to an oak on the borders of Yardley Chase, an oak which I often visit, and which is one of the wonders that I show to all who come this way, and have never seen it. I tell them all that it is a thousand years old, verily believing it to be so, though I do not know it. A mile beyond this oak stands another, which has for time immemorial been known by the name of Judith, and is said to have been an oak when my namesake the Conqueror first came hither. And beside all this, there is a good coach-way to them both, and I design that you shall see them too. . . .—Ever thine, Wm. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Sept. 25, 1788.

My dear Friend—

> Say what is the thing by my riddle design'd
> Which you carried to London, and yet left behind?

I expect your answer, and without a fee. The half hour next before breakfast I devote to you. The moment Mrs. Unwin arrives in the study, be what I have written much or little, I shall make my bow, and take leave. If you live to be a judge, as if I augur right you will, I shall expect to hear of a walking circuit.

I was shocked at what you tell me of ——. Superior talents, it seems, gives no security for propriety of conduct; on the contrary, having a natural tendency to nourish pride, they often betray the possessor into such mistakes as men more moderately gifted never commit. Ability, therefore, is not wisdom, and an ounce of grace

is a better guard against gross absurdity than the brightest talents in the world.

I rejoice that you are prepared for transcript work: here will be plenty for you. The day on which you shall receive this, I beg you will remember to drink one glass at least to the success of the *Iliad*, which I finished the day before yesterday, and yesterday began the *Odyssey*. It will be some time before I shall perceive myself travelling in another road; the objects around me are at present so much the same; Olympus and a council of gods meet me at my first entrance. To tell you the truth, I am weary of heroes and deities, and, with reverence be it spoken, shall be glad for variety's sake to exchange their company for that of a Cyclops.

Weston has not been without its tragedies since you left us; Mrs. Throckmorton's piping bullfinch has been eaten by a rat, and the villain left nothing but poor Bully's beak behind him. It will be a wonder if this event does not at some convenient time employ my versifying passion. Did ever fair lady, from the Lesbia of Catullus to the present day, lose her bird and find no poet to commemorate the loss? W. C.

To Mrs. King

Sept. 25, 1788.

My dearest Madam—How surprised was I this moment to meet a servant at the gate, who told me that he came from you! He could not have been more welcome, unless he had announced yourself. I am charmed with your kindness and with all your elegant presents. So is Mrs. Unwin, who begs me in particular to thank you warmly for the housewife, the very thing she had just begun to want. In the fire-screen you have sent me an enigma, which at present I have not the ingenuity to expound; but some Muse will help me, or I shall meet with somebody able to instruct me. In all that I have seen besides (for that I have not yet seen), I admire both the taste and the execution. A toothpick case I

had; but one so large, that no modern waistcoat pocket could possibly contain it: it was some years since the Dean of Durham's, for whose sake I valued it, though to me useless. Yours is come opportunely to supply the deficiency, and shall be my constant companion to its last thread. The cakes and the apples we will eat, remembering who sent them; and when I say this, I will add also, that when we have neither apples nor cakes to eat, we will still remember you. . . .

W. C.

P.S.—My two hares died little more than two years since; one of them aged ten years, the other eleven years and eleven months.

To Mrs. King

Weston Underwood, Oct. 11, 1788.

My dear Madam—You are perfectly secure from all danger of being overwhelmed with presents from me. It is not much that a poet can possibly have it in his power to give. When he has presented his own works, he may be supposed to have exhausted all means of donation. They are his only superfluity. There was a time, but that time was before I commenced writer for the press, when I amused myself in a way somewhat similar to yours; allowing, I mean, for the difference between masculine and female operations. The scissors and the needle are your chief implements; mine were the chisel and the saw. In those days you might have been in some danger of too plentiful a return for your favours. Tables, such as they were, and joint stools, such as never were, might have travelled to Pertenhall in most inconvenient abundance. But I have long since discontinued this practice, and many others which I found it necessary to adopt, that I might escape the worst of all evils, both in itself and in its consequences —an idle life. Many arts I have exercised with this view, for which nature never designed me; though among them were some in which I arrived at consider-

able proficiency, by mere dint of the most heroic perseverance. There is not a 'squire in all this country who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or bird-cages, than myself: and in the article of cabbage-nets, I had no superior. I even had the hardiness to take in hand the pencil, and studied a whole year the art of drawing. Many figures were the fruit of my labours, which had, at least, the merit of being unparalleled by any production either of art or nature. But before the year was ended, I had occasion to wonder at the progress that may be made, in despite of natural deficiency, by dint alone of practice; for I actually produced three landscapes, which a lady thought worthy to be framed and glazed. I then judged it high time to exchange this occupation for another, lest, by any subsequent productions of inferior merit, I should forfeit the honour I had so fortunately acquired. But gardening was, of all employments, that in which I succeeded best; though even in this I did not suddenly attain perfection. I began with lettuces and cauliflowers: from them I proceeded to cucumbers; next to melons. I then purchased an orange-tree, to which, in due time, I added two or three myrtles. These served me day and night with employment during a whole severe winter. To defend them from the frost, in a situation that exposed them to its severity, cost me much ingenuity and much attendance. I contrived to give them a fire heat; and have waded night after night through the snow, with the bellows under my arm, just before going to bed, to give the latest possible puff to the embers, lest the frost should seize them before morning. Very minute beginnings have sometimes important consequences. From nursing two or three little evergreens, I became ambitious of a green-house, and accordingly built one; which, verse excepted, afforded me amusement for a longer time than any expedient of all the many to which I have fled for refuge from the misery of having nothing to do. When I left Olney for Weston, I could no longer have a green-house of my own; but in a neighbour's garden I find a

better, of which the sole management is consigned to me.

I had need take care, when I begin a letter, that the subject with which I set off be of some importance; for before I can exhaust it, be it what it may, I have generally filled my paper. But self is a subject inexhaustible, which is the reason that though I have said little or nothing, I am afraid, worth your hearing, I have only room to add, that I am, my dear Madam, most truly yours, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Nov. 30, 1788.

My dear Friend—Your letter, accompanying the books with which you have favoured me, and for which I return you a thousand thanks, did not arrive till yesterday. I shall have great pleasure in taking now and then a peep at my old friend Vincent Bourne; the neatest of all men in his versification, though when I was under his ushership, at Westminster, the most slovenly in his person. He was so inattentive to his boys, and so indifferent whether they brought him good or bad exercises, or none at all, that he seemed determined, as he was the best, so to be the last Latin poet of the Westminster line; a plot which, I believe, he executed very successfully; for I have not heard of any who has at all deserved to be compared with him. . . .

W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston-Underwood, Dec. 6, 1788.

My dear Madam—It must, if you please, be a point agreed between us, that we will not make punctuality in writing the test of our regard for each other, lest we should incur the danger of pronouncing and suffering by an unjust sentence, and this mutually. I have told you, I believe, that the half hour before breakfast is my only letter-writing opportunity. In summer I rise rather early, and consequently at that season can find

more time for scribbling than at present. If I enter my study now before nine, I find all at sixes and sevens; for servants will take, in part at least, the liberty claimed by their masters. That you may not suppose us all sluggards alike, it is necessary, however, that I should add a word or two on this subject, in justification of Mrs. Unwin, who, because the days are too short for the important concerns of knitting stockings and mending them, rises generally by candle-light; a practice so much in the style of all the ladies of antiquity who were good for anything, that it is impossible not to applaud it. . . .

Should you again dream of an interview with me, I hope you will have the precaution to shut all doors and windows, that no such impertinents as those you mention may intrude a second time. It is hard that people who never meet awake, cannot come together even in sleep without disturbance. We might, I think, be ourselves untroubled, at a time when we are so incapable of giving trouble to others, even had we the inclination. . . .

Addison speaks of persons who grow dumb in the study of eloquence, and I have actually studied Homer till I am become a mere ignoramus in every other province of literature.

An almost general cessation of egg-laying among the hens has made it impossible for Mrs. Unwin to enterprise a cake. She, however, returns you a thousand thanks for the receipt; and being now furnished with the necessary ingredients, will begin directly. My letter-writing time is spent, and I must now to Homer. With my best respects to Mr. King, I remain, dear Madam, most affectionately yours, W. C.

When I wrote last, I told you, I believe, that Lady Hesketh was with us. She is with us now, making a cheerful winter for us at Weston. The acquisition of a new friend, and, at a late day, the recovery of the friend of our youth, are two of the chief comforts of which this life is susceptible.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

The Lodge, Jan. 19, 1789.

My dear Sir—I have taken, since you went away, many of the walks which we have taken together; and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you. I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect, by the help of a tree or a stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pocket; what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance; and this is a sort of *memoria technica*, which I would recommend to you, if I did not know that you have no occasion for it. . . . W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, Jan. 29, 1789.

My dear Friend—I shall be a better, at least a more frequent correspondent, when I have done with Homer. I am not forgetful of any letters that I owe, and least of all forgetful of my debts in that way to you; on the contrary, I live in a continual state of self-reproach for not writing more punctually; but the old Grecian, whom I charge myself never to neglect, lest I should never finish him, has at present a voice that seems to drown all other demands, and many to which I could listen with more pleasure than even his *os rotundum*. I am now in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, conversing with the dead. Invoke the Muse on my behalf, that I may roll the stone of Sisyphus with some success. To do it as Homer has done it is, I suppose, in our verse and language, impossible; but I will hope not to labour altogether to as little purpose as Sisyphus himself did.

Though I meddle little with politics, and can find but little leisure to do so, the present state of things unavoidably engages a share of my attention. But as they say, Archimedes, when Syracuse was taken, was

found busied in the solution of a problem, so, come what may, I shall be found translating Homer.—Sincerely yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Jan. 31, 1789.

My dearest Cousin—I have dined thrice at the Hall since we lost you, and this morning accompanied Mrs. Frog in her chaise to Chicheley. What vagary I shall perform next is at present uncertain, but such violent doings must have proportionable consequences. Mrs. Unwin certainly recovers, but not fast enough to satisfy me. She now moves from chamber to chamber without help of wheels, but not without help of a staff on one side and a human prop on the other. In another week I hope she will be able to descend the staircase, but it will probably be long ere she will move unsupported. Yesterday an old man came hither on foot from Kimbolton; he brought a basket addressed to me from my yet unseen friend Mrs. King; it contained two pair of bottle-stands, her own manufacture; a knitting bag, and a piece of plum-cake. The time seems approaching when that good lady and we are to be better acquainted; and all these *douceurs* announce it.

I have lately had a letter to write daily, and sometimes more than one; this is one reason why I have not sooner answered your last. You will not forget that you allowed me a latitude in that respect, and I begin already to give you proof how much I am persuaded of the sincerity with which you did it. In truth, I am the busiest man that ever lived sequestered as I do, and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity.

Mr. Chester, who, if not a professed virtuoso, is yet a person of some skill in articles of virtù, produced for our amusement a small drawer furnished with seals and impressions of seals,—antiques. When he had displayed and we had admired all his treasures of this kind, I took the ring from my finger, which you gave me, and offered it to his inspection, telling him by

whom it was purchased, where, and at what price. He examined it with much attention, and begged me to let him take an impression from it. He did so, and expressed still more admiration. I put it again on my finger, and in a quarter of an hour he begged to take another. Having taken another, he returned it to me, saying, that he had shown me an impression of a seal accounted the best in England (if I mistake not, it was a Hercules, an antique in possession of the Duke of Northumberland), but that he thought mine a better, and much undersold at thirty guineas. He took the impression with much address, and I never myself viewed it before to so great advantage.

It would be an easy matter to kill me, by putting me into a chaise and commanding me to talk as I go. It is astonishing how exhausted I feel myself after rumbling and chattering incessantly for three hours. . . .

Wm. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston Lodge, Feb. 4, 1789.

My dear Cousin—A letter of mine is no sooner sealed and sent than I begin to be dissatisfied with, and to hate it. I have accordingly hated the two letters that I have sent to *you* since your departure, on many accounts, but principally because they have neither of them expressed any proportion of what I have felt. I have mourned for the loss of you, and they have not said so. Deal with them as you desire me, for another reason, to deal with yours, — burn them, for they deserve it. . . .

This morning I had a visit from Mr. Greatheed. He has been lately in London, and took the opportunity to get miniatures of himself and his wife. His wife's he showed me: it seemed to me admirably well done, and I asked by whom. He said by Englefeldt,— if I heard and remember the name aright. He then, fixing his eyes on me, said, I wish I had yours! Mine, I replied, is nowhere extant. He replied and said,— That's a pity; I expect Englefeldt soon to call on me.

—Would you give me leave to bring him over to Weston that he may take your likeness? I should be happy to have it.—I answered, I could not possibly refuse a request that did me so much honour. I shall not therefore at last die without leaving something behind me in my own likeness. If Fuseli should happen to come on the same errand, I shall be multiplied with a witness. I felt myself, however, pleased with Mr. Greatheed's request, not because I am fool enough to think a phiz like mine worthy to be perpetuated, but because it seemed to bespeak him more warmly affected toward me than I suspected. . . .— Most truly thine, Wm. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, April 6, 1789.

My dearest Coz— . . . When you next see Mr. Rose, tell him that I love him, though I do not write to him. It is to be hoped that none of my correspondents will measure my regard for them by the frequency, or rather *seldomcy* of my epistles. It is very little that I can do, occupied as I am, towards satisfying their just demands upon me, and I am at this moment in debt to every creature to whom I ever write at all. . . .—Believe me, as I truly am, thine, Wm. Cowper.

To Samuel Rose, Esq

The Lodge, May 20, 1789.

My dear Sir—Finding myself, between twelve and one, at the end of the seventeenth book of the *Odyssey*, I give the interval between the present moment and the time of walking to you. If I write letters before I sit down to Homer, I feel my spirits too flat for poetry; and too flat for letter-writing, if I address myself to Homer first; but the last I choose as the least evil, because my friends will pardon my dullness, but the public will not. . . .

Nothing is more certain, than that when I wrote the line,

God made the country, and man made the town.

I had not the least recollection of that very similar one, which you quote from Hawkins Browne. It convinces me that critics (and none more than Warton, in his notes on Milton's minor poems), have often charged authors with borrowing what they drew from their own fund. Browne was an entertaining companion when he had drunk his bottle, but not before; this proved a snare to him, and he would sometimes drink too much; but I know not that he was chargeable with any other irregularities. He had those among his intimates who would not have been such had he been otherwise viciously inclined;—the Duncombes, in particular, father and son, who were of unblemished morals. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, May 28, 1790.

My dearest Coz—I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion.[1] But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may herafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher, clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, would least wish me to wear it.—Adieu, ever thine—in Homer-hurry, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

The Lodge, June 5, 1789.

My dear Friend—I am going to give you a deal of trouble, but London folks must be content to be troubled by country folks; for in London only can our strange necessities be supplied. You must buy for me, if you please, a cuckoo-clock; and now I will tell you where they are sold, which, Londoner as you are, it is possible you may not know. They are sold, I am informed, at more houses than one, in that narrow part

[1] Vacancy of the laureateship by Warton's death.

of Holborn which leads into Broad St. Giles's. It seems they are well-going clocks, and cheap, which are the two best recommendations of any clock. They are made in Germany, and such numbers of them are annually imported, that they are become even a considerable article of commerce.

I return you many thanks for Boswell's *Tour*. I read it to Mrs. Unwin after supper, and we find it amusing. There is much trash in it, as there must always be in every narrative that relates indiscriminately all that passed. But now and then the Doctor speaks like an oracle, and that makes amends for all. Sir John was a coxcomb, and Boswell is not less a coxcomb, though of another kind. I fancy Johnson made coxcombs of all his friends, and they in return made him a coxcomb; for, with reverence be it spoken, such he certainly was, and flattered as he was, he was sure to be so.

Thanks for your invitation to London,—but unless London can come to me, I fear we shall never meet. I was sure that you would love my friend, when you should once be well acquainted with him; and equally sure that he would take kindly to you.

Now for Homer. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 6, 1789.

. . . Running over what I have written, I feel that I should blush to send it to any but thyself. Another would charge me with being impelled by a vanity from which my conscience sets me clear, to speak so much of myself and my verses as I do. But I thus speak to none but thee, nor to thee do I thus speak from any such motives. I egotize in my letters to thee, not because I am of much importance to myself, but because to thee, both *Ego* and all that *Ego* does, is interesting. God doth know that when I labour most to excel as a poet, I do it under such mortifying impressions of the vanity of all human fame and glory, however acquired, that I wonder I can write at all. . . .—

Ever thine, Wm. Cowper.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 13, 1789.

I steal a few moments from the old Grecian, my dear Cousin, just to hint to you, in the way of admonition, that when this reaches your fair hands the half of June will be over. You will know without my telling you to what subject in particular this gentle insinuation applies.

At present we boast not much either of bright suns or genial airs. In this wonderful climate we have often sunless summers and clear-shining winters; but when once we meet we will not trouble ourselves about the weather. . . .

I dined, as I told you I should, at Newport last Monday, and had an agreeable day. Mr. Greatheed came for me, and carried me thither in a single-horsed chaise almost as high as a phaeton. At first I was rather alarmed at such an extraordinary elevation, having never been accustomed to ride in such triumphant sort; but having learned soon after I mounted that Mrs. Greatheed frequently committed herself to it, I feel it a shame to fear that which has no terrors for a lady. I think them nevertheless dangerous;—should the horse fall, woe to the necks of the riders! . . .

Mrs. Hill's turkey is become the father of fifteen beautiful children;—one of them white, and two or three of them buff. If you see her, pray tell her how much she has enriched us.—I am, my dearest Coz, with Mrs. Unwin's best affections, ever thine,

Wm. Cowper.

P.S.—Many thanks for the waistcoats. I have received a present of a silk one, together with a silver snuff-box, from a person who lays me under an unpleasant restraint, forbidding me absolutely to say from whom. Mrs. U. has a snuff-box also *from the same quarter.*

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, June 16, 1789.

My dear Friend— . . . I think I am a very tractable sort of a poet. Most of my fraternity would as soon shorten the noses of their children because they were said to be too long, as thus dock their compositions in compliance with the opinion of others. I beg that when my life shall be written hereafter, my authorship's ductability of temper may not be forgotten.—I am, my dear Friend! ever yours, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

The Lodge, June 20, 1789.

Amico Mio— . . . Many thanks for the cuckoo, which arrived perfectly safe, and goes well, to the amusement and amazement of all who hear it. Hannah lies awake to hear it, and I am not sure that we have not others in the house that admire his music as much as she.

Having read both Hawkins and Boswell, I now think myself almost as much a master of Johnson's character as if I had known him personally, and cannot but regret *that our bards of other times* found no such biographers as these. They have both been ridiculed, and the wits have had their laugh; but such a history of Milton or Shakespeare, as they have given of Johnson—O how desirable!

To Mrs. Throckmorton

July 18, 1789.

Many thanks, my dear Madam, for your extract from George's letter. I retain but little Italian, yet that little was so forcibly mustered by the consciousness that I was myself the subject, that I presently became master of it. I have always said that George is a poet, and I am never in his company but I discover proofs of it; and the delicate address by which he has

managed his complimentary mention of me, convinces me of it still more than ever. Here are a thousand poets of us, who have impudence enough to write for the public; but amongst the modest men who are by diffidence restrained from such an enterprise are those who would eclipse us all. I wish that George would make the experiment. I would bind on his laurels with my own hand.

Your gardener has gone after his wife, but having neglected to take his lyre, *alias* fiddle, with him, has not yet brought home his Eurydice. Your clock in the hall has stopped, and (strange to tell!) it stopped at sight of the watchmaker; for he only looked at it, and it has been motionless ever since. Mr. Gregson is gone, and the Hall is a desolation. Pray don't think any place pleasant that you may find in your rambles, that we may see you the sooner. Your aviary is all in good health. I pass it everyday, and often inquire at the lattice; the inhabitants of it send their duty, and wish for your return. I took notice of the inscription on your seal, and had we an artist here capable of furnishing me with another, you should read on mine, '*Encore une lettre.*'—Adieu, W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston, Aug. 1, 1789.

My dear Madam—The post brings me no letters that do not grumble at my silence. Had not you, therefore, taken me to task as roundly as others, I should have concluded you, perhaps, more indifferent to my epistles than the rest of my correspondents; of whom one says—'I shall be glad when you have finished Homer; then possibly you will find a little leisure for an old friend.' Another says—'I don't choose to be neglected, unless you equally neglect everyone else.' Thus I hear of it with both ears, and shall till I appear in the shape of two great quarto volumes, the composition of which, I confess, engrosses me to a degree that gives my friends, to whom I feel

myself much obliged for their anxiety to hear from me, but too much reason to complain. Johnson told Mr. Martyn the truth; but your inference from that truth is not altogether so just as most of your conclusions are. Instead of finding myself the more at leisure because my long labour draws to a close, I find myself the more occupied. As when a horse approaches the goal, he does not, unless he is jaded, slacken his pace, but quickens it: even so it fares with me. The end is in view; I seem almost to have reached the mark; and the nearness of it inspires me with fresh alacrity. But, be it known to you that I have still two books of the *Odyssey* before me, and, when they are finished, shall have almost the whole eight-and-forty to revise. Judge then, my dear Madam, if it is yet time for me to play, or to gratify myself with scribbling to those I love. No. It is still necessary that waking I should be all absorpt in Homer, and that sleeping I should dream of nothing else.

I am a great lover of good paintings, but no connoisseur, having never had an opportunity to become one. In the last forty years of my life, I have hardly seen six pictures that were worth looking at; for I was never a frequenter of auctions, having never had any spare money in my pocket; and the public exhibitions of them in London had hardly taken place when I left it. My Cousin, who is with us, saw the gentleman whose pieces you mention, on the top of a scaffold, copying a famous picture in the Vatican. She has seen some of his performances, and much admires them. . . .—Affectionately yours, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Aug. 8, 1789.

My dear Friend—Come when you will, or when you can, you cannot come at a wrong time, but we shall expect you on the day mentioned.

If you have any book that you think will make pleasant evening reading, bring it with you. I now

read Mrs. Piozzi's *Travels* to the ladies after supper, and shall probably have finished them before we shall have the pleasure of seeing you. It is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we who make books ourselves are more merciful to book-makers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write; there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the *Dunciad* should have written these lines,

> The mercy I to others show,
> That mercy show to me.

Alas! for Pope, if the mercy he showed to others was the measure of the mercy he received! he was the less pardonable too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition.

I scratch this between dinner and tea; a time when I cannot write much without disordering my noddle, and bringing a flush into my face. You will excuse me therefore if, through respect for the two important considerations of health and beauty, I conclude myself, ever yours, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

August 12, 1789.

My dear Friend—I rejoice that you and Mrs. Hill are so agreeably occupied in your retreat. August, I hope, will make us amends for the gloom of its many wintry predecessors. We are now gathering from our meadows, not hay, but muck; such stuff as deserves not the carriage, which yet it must have, that the after-crop may have leave to grow. The Ouse has hardly deigned to run in its channel since the summer began.

My muse were a vixen, if she were not always ready to fly in obedience to your commands. But what can be done? I can write nothing in the few hours that remain to me of this day, that will be fit for your purpose; and, unless I could dispatch what I write by to-morrow's post, it would not reach you in time. I

must add, too, that my friend the vicar of the next parish engaged me, the day before yesterday, to furnish him by next Sunday with a hymn, to be sung on the occasion of his preaching to the children of the Sunday-school: of which hymn I have not yet produced a syllable. I am somewhat in the case of lawyer Dowling in *Tom Jones*; and could I split myself into as many poets as there are Muses, could find employment for them all.—Adieu, my dear Friend, I am ever yours, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Aug. 16, 1789.

My dear Friend— . . . That the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* should have proved the occasion of my suspending my correspondence with you, is a proof how little we foresee the consequences of what we publish. Homer, I daresay, hardly at all suspected that at the fag-end of time two personages would appear, the one ycleped Sir Newton, and the other Sir Cowper, who, loving each other heartily, would nevertheless suffer the pains of an interrupted intercourse, his poems the cause. So, however, it has happened; and though it would not, I suppose, extort from the old bard a single sigh, if he knew it, yet to me it suggests the serious reflection above mentioned. An author by profession had need narrowly to watch his pen, lest a line should escape it which by possibility may do mischief, when he has been long dead and buried. What we have done, when we have written a book, will never be known till the Day of Judgement: then the account will be liquidated, and all the good that it has occasioned, and all the evil, will witness either for or against us.

I am now in the last book of the *Odyssey*, yet have still, I suppose, half a year's work before me. The accurate revisal of two such voluminous poems can hardly cost me less. I rejoice, however, that the goal is in prospect; for though it has cost me years to run this race, it is only now that I begin to have a glimpse

of it. That I shall never receive any proportionable pecuniary recompense for my long labours, is pretty certain; and as to any fame that I may possibly gain by it, *that* is a commodity that daily sinks in value, in measure as the consummation of all things approaches. In the day when the lion shall dandle the kid, and a little child shall lead them, the world will have lost all relish for the fabulous legends of antiquity, and Homer and his translator may budge off the stage together. . . .

WM. COWPER.

To SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

Weston, Oct. 4, 1789.

My dear Friend—The hamper is come, and come safe; and the contents I can affirm on my own knowledge are excellent. It chanced that another hamper and box came by the same conveyance, all which I unpacked and expounded in the hall; my cousin sitting, meantime, on the stairs, spectatress of the business. We diverted ourselves with imagining the manner in which Homer would have described the scene. Detailed in his circumstantial way, it would have furnished materials for a paragraph of considerable length in an *Odyssey*.

> The straw-stuff'd hamper with his ruthless steel
> He open'd, cutting sheer th' inserted cords,
> Which bound the lid and lip secure. Forth came
> The rustling package first, bright straw of wheat,
> Or oats, or barley; next a bottle green
> Throat-full, clear spirits the contents, distill'd
> Drop after drop odorous, by the art
> Of the fair mother of his friend—the Rose.

And so on. I should rejoice to be the hero of such a tale in the hands of Homer.

You will remember, I trust, that when the state of your health or spirits calls for rural walks and fresh air, you have always a retreat at Weston.

To Lady Hesketh

Dec. 13, 1789.

My dearest Cousin— . . . Received from my master, on account current with Lady Hesketh, the sum of—one kiss on my forehead. Witness my paw,

Beau + his mark.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

[*No date.*]

My dear Walter—I know that you are too reasonable a man to expect anything like punctuality of correspondence from a translator of Homer, especially from one who is a doer also of many other things at the same time; for I labour hard not only to acquire a little fame for myself, but to win it also for others, men of whom I know nothing, not even their names, who send me their poetry, that by translating it out of prose into verse, I may make it more like poetry than it was. Having heard all this, you will feel yourself not only inclined to pardon my long silence, but to pity me also for the cause of it. You may, if you please, believe likewise, for it is true, that I have a faculty of remembering my friends even when I do not write to them, and of loving them not one jot the less, though I leave them to starve for want of a letter from me. And now I think you have an apology both as to style, matter, and manner, altogether unexceptionable.

Why is the winter like a backbiter? Because Solomon says that a backbiter separates between chief friends, and so does the winter; to this dirty season it is owing, that I see nothing of the valuable Chesters, whom indeed I see less at all times than serves at all to content me. I hear of them indeed occasionally from my neighbours at the Hall, but even of that comfort I have lately enjoyed less than usual, Mr. Throckmorton having been hindered by his first fit of the gout from his usual visits to Chicheley. The gout, however, has not prevented his making me a handsome present of a folio edition of the *Iliad*, published about a year since

at Venice, by a literato, who calls himself *Villoison.* It is possible that you have seen it, and that if you have it not yourself, it has at least found its way to Lord Bagot's library. If neither should be the case, when I write next (for sooner or later I shall write to you again if I live), I will send you some pretty stories out of his *Prolegomena*, which will make your hair stand on end, as mine has stood on end already, they so horribly affect, in point of authenticity, the credit of the works of the immortal Homer.

Wishing you and Mrs. Bagot all the happiness that a new year can possibly bring with it, I remain, with Mrs. Unwin's best respects, yours, my dear Friend, with all sincerity, W. C.

My paper mourns for the death of Lord Cowper, my valuable cousin, and much my benefactor.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

[*No date.*]

My dear Friend—I am a terrible creature for not writing sooner, but the old excuse must serve, at least I will not occupy paper with the addition of others unless you should insist on it, in which case I can assure you that I have them ready. Now to business.

From *Villoison* I learn that it was the avowed opinion and persuasion of Callimachus (whose hymns we both studied at Westminster), that Homer was very imperfectly understood even in his day: that his admirers, deceived by the perspicuity of his style, fancied themselves masters of his meaning, when in truth they knew little about it.

Now we know that Callimachus, as I have hinted, was himself a poet, and a good one; he was also esteemed a good critic: he almost, if not actually, adored Homer, and imitated him as nearly as he could.

What shall we say to this? I will tell you what I say to it. Callimachus meant, and he could mean nothing more by this assertion, than that the poems of Homer were in fact an allegory; that under the

obvious import of his stories lay concealed a mystic sense, sometimes philosophical, sometimes religious, sometimes moral, — and that the generality either wanted penetration or industry, or had not been properly qualified by their studies, to discover it. This I can readily believe, for I am myself an ignoramus in these points, and except here and there, discern nothing more than the letter. But if Callimachus will tell me that even of *that* I am ignorant, I hope soon by two great volumes to convince him of the contrary.

I learn also from the same Villoison, that Pisistratus, who was a sort of Maecenas in Athens, where he gave great encouragement to literature, and built and furnished a public library, regretting that there was no complete copy of Homer's works in the world, resolved to make one. For this purpose, he advertised rewards in all the newspapers to those who, being possessed *memoriter* of any part or parcels of the poems of that bard, would resort to his house, and repeat them to his secretaries, that they might write them. Now it happened that more were desirous of the reward than qualified to deserve it. The consequence was that the non-qualified persons having, many of them, a pretty knack at versification, imposed on the generous Athenian most egregiously, giving him instead of Homer's verses, which they had not to give, verses of their own invention. He, good creature, suspecting no such fraud, took them all for gospel, and entered them into his volume accordingly.

Now let *him* believe the story who can. That Homer's works were in this manner corrected, I *can* believe; but that a learned Athenian could be so imposed upon, with sufficient means of detection at hand, I *cannot*. Would he not be on his guard? Would not a difference of style and manner have occurred? Would not that difference have excited a suspicion? Would not that suspicion have led to inquiry? and would not that inquiry have issued in detection? For how easy was it in the multitude of Homer-conners to find two, ten, twenty, possessed of the questionable passage, and

by confronting them with the impudent impostor, to convict him. *Abeas ergo in malam rem cum istis tuis hallucinationibus, Villoisone!*—Faithfully yours,

W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston Underwood, Jan. 4, 1790.

My dear Madam—Your long silence has occasioned me to have a thousand anxious thoughts about you. So long it has been, that whether I now write to a Mrs. King at present on earth, or already in heaven, I know not. I have friends whose silence troubles me less, though I have known them longer; because, if I hear not from themselves, I yet learn from others that they are still living, and likely to live. But if your letters cease to bring me news of your welfare, from whom can I gain the desirable intelligence? The birds of the air will not bring it, and third person there is none between us by whom it might be conveyed. Nothing is plain to me on this subject, but that either you are dead, or very much indisposed; or, which would affect me with perhaps as deep a concern, though of a different kind, very much offended. The latter of these suppositions I think the least probable, conscious as I am of an habitual desire to offend nobody, especially a lady, and especially a lady to whom I have many obligations. But all the three solutions abovementioned are very uncomfortable; and if you live, and can send me one that will cause me less pain than either of them, I conjure you, by the charity and benevolence which I know influence you upon all occasions, to communicate it without delay.

It is possible, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, that you are not become perfectly indifferent to me, and to what concerns me. I will therefore add a word or two on a subject which once interested you, and which is, for that reason, worthy to be mentioned, though truly for no other—meaning myself. I am well, and have been so (uneasiness on your account excepted), both in mind and body, ever since I wrote

to you last. I have still the same employment: Homer in the morning, and Homer in the evening, as constant as the day goes round. In the spring I hope to send the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the press. So much for me and my occupations. Poor Mrs. Unwin has hitherto had but an unpleasant winter,—unpleasant as constant pain, either in her head or side, could make it. She joins me in affectionate compliments to yourself and Mr. King, and in earnest wishes that you will soon favour me with a line that shall relieve me from all my perplexities.—I am, dear Madam, sincerely yours,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Jan. 23, 1790.

My dearest Coz—I had a letter yesterday from the wild boy Johnson,[1] for whom I had conceived a great affection. It was just such a letter as I like, of the true helter-skelter kind; and though he writes a remarkably good hand, scribbled with such rapidity, that it was barely legible. He gave me a droll account of the adventures of Lord Howard's note, and of his own in pursuit of it. The poem he brought me came as from Lord Howard, with his lordship's request that I would revise it. It is in the form of a pastoral, and is entitled *The Tale of the Lute*; or, *The Beauties of Audley End.* I read it attentively; was much pleased with part of it, and part of it I equally disliked. I told him so, and in such terms as one naturally uses when there seems to be no occasion to qualify or to alleviate censure. I observed him afterwards somewhat more thoughtful and silent, but occasionally as pleasant as usual; and in Kilwick wood, where we walked the next day, the truth came out; that he was himself the author; and that Lord Howard not approving it altogether, and several friends of his own age, to whom he had shown it, differing from his lordship in opinion, and being highly pleased with it, he had come at last to a resolution to abide by my judgement;

[1] Cowper's cousin, afterwards the Rev. John Johnson of Norfolk.

a measure to which Lord Howard by all means advised him. He accordingly brought it, and will bring it again in the summer, when we shall lay our heads together and try to mend it.

I have lately had a letter also from Mrs. King, to whom I had written to inquire whether she were living or dead. She tells me the critics expect from my Homer everything in some parts, and that in others I shall fall short. These are the Cambridge critics; and she has her intelligence from the botanical professor, Martyn. That gentleman in reply answers them, that I shall fall short in nothing, but shall disappoint them all. It shall be my endeavour to do so, and I am not without hope of succeeding. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Jan. 26, 1790.

My blunder in thanking thee, my dearest Coz, for a basket instead of a box, seems to have had something prophetic in it; for in the evening a basket sent from you, and filled with excellent fishes, actually arrived: with some of them we have compensated our neighbours for pigs presented to us in times past, and on the remainder we have chiefly subsisted ever since, nor is our stock even now exhausted. Many thanks are due to thee for this supply, and we pay them with much sincerity.

Could I blunder as I did in the instance of my Norfolk cousin, always, I mean, with such ludicrous consequences, I should be tempted to do it daily. I have not laughed so much many a long day as at your and his droll account of the strange and unimaginable distresses that ensued on the mere omission of those two important syllables that compose the name of Johnson.

It gives me great pleasure that you are so much pleased with him, because I was much pleased with him myself. There is a simplicity in his character that charms me, and the more because it is so great a

rarity. Humour he certainly has, and of the most agreeable kind. His letter to you proves it, and so does his poem ; and that he has many other talents which, at present, his shyness too much suppresses, I doubt not. He has a countenance which, with all the sweetness of temper that it expresses, expresses also a mind much given to reflection, and an understanding that in due time will know how to show itself to advantage.

An indisposition from which Mrs. Frog was not sufficiently recovered to see company, and especially a stranger, was the reason of our not being invited while he was with me. She is now, however, perfectly restored ; I dined there the day after he went, and dine there again to-morrow.

The young man begged that he might carry away with him eight or ten books of Homer, which he would transcribe for me, he said, at Cambridge ; but I feared to trust them in that pestilent place, where some of his wild young *Trigrymates* might have snatched them from him, and have done with them I know not what. . . .

Our friends at the Hall are all pretty well at present ; but the lord of the mansion has not perfectly recovered his foot again. Mrs. Unwin still has her fever, which chiefly attacks her in the night. Beau is well, as are the two cats, and the three birds, whose cages I am going to clean, and all send their love to you.—Yours, my dear, Wm. C.

A bank-note will be most commodious, and we have no fears about its safe arrival. Johnson, I believe, is tolerably well incomed. I asked him if he depended on his success in the church for a maintenance, and he answered,—No.

A rod is preparing for Miss Birch, and when Enfield's *Speaker* appears she will feel it.

'Tis hardly fair, Miss Birch, that you
Should steal our hearts and poems too.

To the Rev. John Newton

Feb. 5, 1790.

My dear Friend — Your kind letter deserved a

speedier answer, but you know my excuse, which were I to repeat always, my letters would resemble the fag-end of a newspaper, where we always find the price of stocks, detailed with little or no variation.

When January returns, you have your feelings concerning me, and such as prove the faithfulness of your friendship. I have mine also concerning myself, but they are of a cast different from yours. Yours have a mixture of sympathy and tender solicitude, which makes them, perhaps, not altogether unpleasant. Mine, on the contrary, are of an unmixed nature, and consist simply, and merely, of the most alarming apprehensions. Twice has that month returned upon me, accompanied by such horrors as I have no reason to suppose ever made part of the experience of any other man. I accordingly look forward to it, and meet it, with a dread not to be imagined. I number the nights as they pass, and in the morning bless myself that another night is gone, and no harm has happened. This may argue, perhaps, some imbecility of mind, and no small degree of it; but it is natural, I believe, and so natural as to be necessary and unavoidable. I know that God is not governed by secondary causes, in any of His operations, and that, on the contrary, they are all so many agents, in His hand, which strike only when He bids them. I know consequently that one month is as dangerous to me as another, and that in the middle of summer, at noonday, and in the clear sunshine, I am, in reality, unless guarded by Him, as much exposed, as when fast asleep at midnight, and in midwinter. But we are not always the wiser for our knowledge, and I can no more avail myself of mine, than if it were in the head of another man, and not in my own. I have heard of bodily aches and ails that have been particularly troublesome when the season returned in which the hurt that occasioned them was received. The mind, I believe (with my own, however, I am sure it is so), is liable to similar periodical affection. But February is come; January, my terror, is passed; and some shades of the gloom that attended

his presence, have passed with him. I look forward with a little cheerfulness to the buds and the leaves that will soon appear, and say to myself, till they turn yellow will I make myself easy. The year *will* go round, and January *will* approach. I *shall* tremble again, and I know it; but in the meantime I will be as comfortable as I can. Thus, in respect of peace of mind, such as it is that I enjoy, I subsist, as the poor are vulgarly said to do, from hand to mouth; and, of a Christian, such as you once knew me, am, by a strange transformation, become an Epicurean philosopher, bearing this motto on my mind,—*Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere.* . . .—I remain, my dear Friend, truly yours, WM. COWPER.

To LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, Feb. 26, 1790.

. . . I am delighted with Mrs. Bodham's kindness, in giving me the only picture of my own mother that is to be found, I suppose, in all the world. I had rather possess it than the richest jewel in the British crown, for I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated. I remember her too, young as I was when she died, well enough to know that it is a very exact resemblance of her, and as such it is to me invaluable. Everybody loved her, and with an amiable character so impressed upon all her features, everybody was sure to do so.

I have a very affectionate and a very clever letter from Johnson, who promises me the transcript of the books entrusted to him in a few days. I have a great love for that young man; he had some drops of the same stream in his veins that once animated the original of that dear picture. W. C.

To MRS. BODHAM

Weston, Feb. 27, 1790.

My dearest Rose—Whom I thought withered, and fallen from the stalk, but whom I still find alive:

nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her: I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake, and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother; and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability; and a little, I would hope, both of his and of her——, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy,

your nephew, to my knowledge; and that breaking through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest Cousin, what shall I say to you in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together, for want of house-room; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room; and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me; she was my playfellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so! Neither do I at all forget my Cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest Cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am, my dear, dear Rose, ever yours, W. C.

P.S.—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P.S.—I find on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we

have not only room for you, and Mr. Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Weston, Feb. 28, 1790.

My dear Cousin John—I have much wished to hear from you, and though you are welcome to write to Mrs. Unwin as often as you please, I wish myself to be numbered among your correspondents.

I shall find time to answer you, doubt it not! Be as busy as we may, we can always find time to do what is agreeable to us. By the way, had you a letter from Mrs. Unwin? I am witness that she addressed one to you before you went into Norfolk; but your mathematico-poetical head forgot to acknowledge the receipt of it.

I was never more pleased in my life than to learn, and to learn from herself, that my dearest Rose[1] is still alive. Had she not engaged me to love her by the sweetness of her character when a child, she would have done it effectually now, by making me the most acceptable present in the world, my own dear mother's picture. I am perhaps the only person living who remembers her, but I remember her well, and can attest on my own knowledge, the truth of the resemblance. Amiable and elegant as the countenance is, such exactly was her own; she was one of the tenderest parents, and so just a copy of her is therefore to me invaluable.

I wrote yesterday to my Rose, to tell her all this, and to thank her for her kindness in sending it. Neither do I forget your kindness, who intimated to her that I should be happy to possess it.

She invites me into Norfolk; but, alas, she might as well invite the house in which I dwell; for all other

[1] Mrs. Anne Bodham.

considerations and impediments apart, how is it possible that a translator of Homer should lumber to such a distance? But though I cannot comply with her kind invitation, I have made myself the best amends in my power by inviting her, and all the family of Donnes to Weston. Perhaps we could not accommodate them all at once, but in succession we could; and can at any time find room for five, three of them being females, and one a married one. You are a mathematician; tell me then how five persons can be lodged in three beds (two males and three females), and I shall have good hope, that you will proceed a senior optime? It would make me happy to see our house so furnished. As to yourself, whom I know to be a *subscalarian*, or a man that sleeps under the stairs, I should have no objection at all, neither could you possibly have any yourself to the garret, as a place in which you might be disposed of with great felicity of accommodation. . . .

What have you done with your poem? The trimming that it procured you here has not, I hope, put you out of conceit with it entirely; you are more than equal to the alteration that it needs. Only remember, that in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle: the want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning, because nobody will take the pains to poke for it. So now adieu for the present. Beware of killing yourself with problems; for if you do, you will never live to be another Sir Isaac.

Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances attend you; Lady Hesketh is much disposed to love you; perhaps most who know you have some little tendency the same way.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

The Lodge, March 11, 1790.

My dear Friend—I was glad to hear from you, for a line from you gives me always much pleasure, but was not much gladdened by the contents of your letter.

The state of your health, which I have learned more accurately perhaps from my Cousin, except in this last instance, than from yourself, has rather alarmed me, and even she has collected her information upon that subject more from your looks, than from your own acknowledgements. To complain much and often of our indispositions, does not always ensure the pity of the hearer, perhaps sometimes forfeits it; but to dissemble them altogether, or at least to suppress the worst, is attended ultimately with an inconvenience greater still; the secret will out at last, and our friends, unprepared to receive it, are doubly distressed about us. In saying this I squint a little at Mrs. Unwin, who will read it; it is with her, as with you, the only subject on which she practises any dissimulation at all; the consequence is, that when she is much indisposed I never believe myself in possession of the whole truth, live in constant expectation of hearing something worse, and at the long run am seldom disappointed. It seems therefore, as on all other occasions, so even in this, the better course on the whole to appear what we are; not to lay the fears of our friends asleep by cheerful looks, which do not properly belong to us, or by letters written as if we were well, when in fact we are very much otherwise. On condition, however, that you act differently toward me for the future, I will pardon the past; and she may gather from my clemency shown to you, some hopes, on the same conditions, of similar clemency to herself.

W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston Underwood, March 12, 1790.

My dear Madam— . . . I have lately received from a female cousin of mine in Norfolk, whom I have not seen these thirty years, a picture of my own mother. She died when I wanted two days of being six years old; yet I remember her perfectly, find the picture a strong likeness of her, because her memory has been ever precious to me, have written a poem on the receipt of it: a poem which, one excepted, I had more pleasure

in writing, than any that I ever wrote. That one was addressed to a lady whom I expect in a few minutes to come down to breakfast, and who has supplied to me the place of my own mother—my own invaluable mother, these six-and-twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers, but a plurality of mothers is not common. . . . W. C.

To Mrs. Throckmorton

The Lodge, March 21, 1790.

My dearest Madam—I shall only observe on the subject of your absence that you have stretched it since you went, and have made it a week longer. Weston is sadly *unked* without you; and here are two of us, who will be heartily glad to see you again. I believe you are happier at home than anywhere, which is a comfortable belief to your neighbours, because it affords assurance that since you are neither likely to ramble for pleasure, nor to meet with any avocations of business, while Weston shall continue to be your home, it will not often want you. . . .

My periwig is arrived, and is the very perfection of all periwigs, having only one fault; which is, that my head will only go into the first half of it, the other half, or the upper part of it, continuing still unoccupied. My artist in this way at Olney has, however, undertaken to make the whole of it tenantable, and then I shall be twenty years younger than you have ever seen me.

I heard of your birthday very early in the morning; the news came from the steeple. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, March 22, 1790.

I rejoice, my dearest Cousin, that my MSS. have roamed the earth so successfully, and have met with no disaster. The single book excepted that went to the bottom of the Thames and rose again, they have been fortunate without exception. I am not super-

stitious, but have nevertheless as good a right to believe that adventure an omen, and a favourable one, as Swift had to interpret, as he did, the loss of a fine fish, which he had no sooner laid on the bank, than it flounced into the water again. This he tells us himself he always considered as a type of his future disappointments: and why may not I as well consider the marvellous recovery of my lost book from the bottom of the Thames, as typical of its future prosperity? To say the truth, I have no fears now about the success of my Translation, though in time past I have had many. I knew there was a style somewhere, could I but find it, in which Homer ought to be rendered, and which alone would suit him. Long time I blundered about it, ere I could attain to any decided judgement on the matter; at first I was betrayed by a desire of accommodating my language to the simplicity of his, into much of the quaintness that belonged to our writers of the fifteenth century. In the course of many revisals I have delivered myself from this evil, I believe, entirely; but I have done it slowly, and as a man separates himself from his mistress when he is going to marry. I had so strong a predilection in favour of this style at first, that I was crazed to find that others were not as much enamoured with it as myself. At every passage of that sort which I obliterated, I groaned bitterly, and said to myself, I am spoiling my work to please those who have no taste for the simple graces of antiquity. But in measure, as I adopted a more modern phraseology, I became a convert to their opinion, and in the last revisal, which I am now making, am not sensible of having spared a single expression of the obsolete kind. I see my work so much improved by this alteration, that I am filled with wonder at my own backwardness to assent to the necessity of it, and the more when I consider that Milton, with whose manner I account myself intimately acquainted, is never quaint, never twangs through the nose, but is everywhere grand and elegant, without resorting to musty antiquity for his beauties. On the contrary, he took a long stride forward, left the language

of his own day far behind him, and anticipated the expressions of a century yet to come. . . .

I leave the little space for Mrs. Unwin's use, who means, I believe, to occupy it, and am evermore thine most truly, W. C.

Postscript in the hand of Mrs. Unwin

You cannot imagine how much your ladyship would oblige your unworthy servant, if you would be so good to let me know in what point I differ from you. All that at present I can say is, that I will readily sacrifice my own opinion, unless I can give you a substantial reason for adhering to it.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Weston, March 23, 1790.

. . .You are a man to be envied, who have never read the *Odyssey*, which is one of the most amusing story-books in the world. There is also much of the finest poetry in the world to be found in it, notwithstanding all that Longinus has insinuated to the contrary. His comparison of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to the meridian, and to the declining sun, is pretty, but I am persuaded, not just. The prettiness of it seduced him; he was otherwise too judicious a reader of Homer to have made it. I can find in the latter no symptoms of impaired ability, none of the effects of age; on the contrary, it seems to me a certainty, that Homer, had he written the *Odyssey* in his youth, could not have written it better: and if the *Iliad* in his old age, that he would have written it just as well. A critic would tell me, that instead of *written*, I should have said *composed*. Very likely;—but I am not writing to one of that snarling generation.

My boy, I long to see thee again. It has happened, some way or other, that Mrs. Unwin and I have conceived a great affection for thee. That I should, is the less to be wondered at (because thou art a shred of my own mother); neither is the wonder great that she

should fall into the same predicament: for she loves everything that I love. You will observe that your own personal right to be beloved makes no part of the consideration. There is nothing that I touch with so much tenderness as the vanity of a young man, because I know how extremely susceptible he is of impressions that might hurt him in that particular part of his composition. If you should ever prove a coxcomb, from which character you stand just now at a greater distance than any young man I know, it shall never be said that I have made you one; no, you will gain nothing by me but the honour of being much valued by a poor poet, who can do you no good while he lives, and has nothing to leave you when he dies. If you can be contented to be dear to me on these conditions, so you shall; but other terms more advantageous than these, or more inviting, none have I to propose.

Farewell. Puzzle not yourself about a subject when you write to either of us; everything is subject enough from those we love. W. C.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Weston, April 17, 1790.

Your letter that now lies before me is almost three weeks old, and therefore of full age to receive an answer, which it shall have without delay, if the interval between the present moment and that of breakfast should prove sufficient for the purpose.

Yours to Mrs. Unwin was received yesterday, for which she will thank you in due time. I have also seen, and have now in my desk, your letter to Lady Hesketh; she sent it thinking that it would divert me; in which she was not mistaken. I shall tell her when I write to her next, that you long to receive a line from her. Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript; it was an innocent deception, at least it could harm nobody save yourself; an effect which it did not fail to produce;—and since

the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least it may very well be forgiven. You ask, how I can tell that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind? And certainly, if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable; but in general a man who reaches my years finds

> That long experience does attain
> To something like prophetic strain.

I am very much of Lavater's opinion, and persuaded that faces are as legible as books, only with these circumstances to recommend them to our perusal, that they are read in much less time, and are much less likely to deceive us. Yours gave me a favourable impression of you the moment I beheld it, and though I shall not tell you in particular what I saw in it, for reasons mentioned in my last, I will add that I have observed in you nothing since that has not confirmed the opinion I then formed in your favour. In fact, I cannot recollect that my skill in physiognomy has ever deceived me, and I should add more on this subject had I room.

When you have shut up your mathematical books, you must give yourself to the study of Greek; not merely that you may be able to read Homer and the other Greek classics with ease, but the Greek Testament, and the Greek fathers also. Thus qualified, and by the aid of your fiddle into the bargain, together with some portion of the grace of God (without which nothing can be done), to enable you to look well to your flock, when you shall get one, you will be well set up for a parson. In which character, if I live to see you in it, I shall expect and hope that you will make a very different figure from most of your fraternity.—Ever yours,

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, April 19, 1790.

My dearest Coz—I thank thee for my cousin Johnson's letter, which diverted me. I had one from him

lately, in which he expressed an ardent desire of a line from you, and the delight he would feel in receiving it. I know not whether you will have the charity to satisfy his longings, but mention the matter, thinking it possible that you may. A letter from a lady to a youth immersed in mathematics must be singularly pleasant.

I am finishing Homer backward, having begun at the last book, and designing to persevere in that crab-like fashion, till I arrive at the first. This may remind you perhaps of a certain poet's prisoner in the Bastille (thank Heaven! in the Bastille now no more), counting the nails in the door for variety's sake in all directions. I find so little to do in the last revisal, that I shall soon reach the *Odyssey*, and soon want those books of it which are in thy possession; but the two first of the *Iliad*, which are also in thy possession, much sooner; thou mayest therefore send them by the first fair opportunity. I am in high spirits on this subject, and think that I have at last licked the clumsy cub into a shape that will secure to it the favourable notice of the public. . . . W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

May 2 (1790), *Sunday*, 2 *o'clock.*

My dearest Coz—I send this in answer to yours just received, by express to Newport, to prevent if possible thy sending us any salmon at the enormous price you mention. We shall not in the meantime die for want of fish, my friend Sephus having lately sent two baskets of mackerel, on the last of which we dine to-day, and Griggy dines with us on a turkey to-morrow. Therefore send no salmon, unless you wish us both to be choked, till it comes down to a price that one may swallow with safety. . . .—Yours, with the celerity of lightning, Wm. Cowper.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

May 2, 1790.

My dear Friend—I am still at the old sport—Homer all the morning, and Homer all the evening. Thus have I been held in constant employment, I know not exactly how many, but I believe these six years, an interval of eight months excepted. It is now become so familiar to me to take Homer from my shelf at a certain hour, that I shall, no doubt, continue to take him from my shelf at the same time, even after I have ceased to want him. That period is not far distant. I am now giving the last touches to a work which, had I foreseen the difficulty of it, I should never have meddled with; but which, having at length nearly finished it to my mind, I shall discontinue with regret.

My very best compliments attend Mrs. Hill, whom I love unsight unseen, as they say; but yet truly.—Yours ever, Wm. Cowper.

To Mrs. Throckmorton

The Lodge, May 10, 1790.

My dear Mrs. Frog—You have by this time, I presume, heard from the Doctor, whom I desired to present to you our best affections, and to tell you that we are well. He sent an urchin (I do not mean a hedge-hog, commonly called an urchin in old times, but a boy, commonly so called at present), expecting that he would find you at Bucklands, whither he supposed you gone on Thursday. He sent him charged with divers articles, and among others with letters, or at least with a letter; which I mention, that if the boy should be lost, together with his dispatches, past all possibility of recovery, you may yet know that the Doctor stands acquitted of not writing. That he is utterly lost (that is to say, the boy, for the Doctor being the last antecedent, as the grammarians say, you might otherwise suppose that he was intended), is the more probable, because he was never four miles

from his home before, having only travelled at the side of a plough-team ; and when the Doctor gave him his direction to Bucklands, he asked, very naturally, if that place was in England. So what has become of him Heaven knows !

I do not know that any adventures have presented themselves since your departure worth mentioning, except that the rabbit, that infested your wilderness, has been shot for devouring your carnations ; and that I myself have been in some danger of being devoured in like manner by a great dog, viz. Pearson's. But I wrote him a letter on Friday (I mean a letter to Pearson, not to his dog, which I mention to prevent mistakes—for the said last antecedent might occasion them in this place also), informing him, that unless he tied up his great mastiff in the day-time, I would send him a worse thing, commonly called and known by the name of an attorney. When I go forth to ramble in the fields, I do not sally like Don Quixote, with a purpose of encountering monsters, if any such can be found ; but am a peaceable and poor gentleman, and a poet, who mean nobody any harm,—the foxhunters and the two universities of this land excepted.

I cannot learn from any creature whether the Turnpike Bill is alive or dead ;—so ignorant am I, and by such ignoramuses surrounded. But if I know little else, this at least I know, that I love you and Mr. Frog ; that I long for your return, and that I am with Mrs. Unwin's best affections, ever yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston, June 3, 1790.

You will wonder when I tell you that I, even I, am considered by people, who live at a great distance, as having interest and influence sufficient to procure a place at court for those who may happen to want one. I have accordingly been applied to within these few days by a Welshman, with a wife and many children, to get him made poet-laureate as fast as possible. If

thou wouldst wish to make the world merry twice a year, thou canst not do better than procure the office for him. I will promise thee, that he shall afford thee a hearty laugh in return every birthday, and every new year. He is an honest man.—Adieu! W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 6, 1790.

Dearest Coz—I should sooner have acknowledged the receipt of thy charity-box had I not been lately engaged more than usual, not in poetry alone, but in business also. I now tell you, however, that it came safe, to our great joy, and to the great joy especially of the two future mothers whose children were in some danger not only of coming naked from the womb, but of continuing naked afterwards. The money has been divided between them, and the linen; and by me they thank thee with unfeigned gratitude for thy bounty. . . .—I am, ever thine, Wm. Cowper.

Thanks for the papers, and for the odd Odd-yssey.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

The Lodge, June 8, 1790.

My dear Friend—Among the many who love and esteem you, there is none who rejoices more in your felicity than myself. Far from blaming, I commend you much for connecting yourself, young as you are, with a well-chosen companion for life. Entering on the state with uncontaminated morals, you have the best possible prospect of happiness, and will be secure against a thousand and ten thousand temptations, to which, at an early period of life, in such a Babylon as you must necessarily inhabit, you would otherwise have been exposed. I see it too in the light you do, as likely to be advantageous to you in your profession. Men of business have a better opinion of a candidate for employment, who is married, because he has given bond to the world, as you observe, and to himself, for diligence,

industry, and attention. It is altogether therefore a subject of much congratulation; and mine, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's, is very sincere. Samson at his marriage proposed a riddle to the Philistines. I am no Samson, neither are you a Philistine. Yet expound to me the following, if you can.

What are they, which stand at a distance from each other, and meet without ever moving?

Should you be so fortunate as to guess it, you may propose it to the company, when you celebrate your nuptials; and if you can win thirty changes of raiment by it, as Samson did by his, let me tell you, they will be no contemptible acquisition to a young beginner.

You will not, I hope, forget your way to Weston, in consequence of your marriage, where you and yours will be always welcome. W. C.

To Mrs. King

Weston, June 14, 1790.

My dear Madam—I have hardly a scrap of paper belonging to me that is not scribbled over with blank verse; and taking out your letter from a bundle of others, this moment, I find it thus inscribed on the seal side:

—— meantime his steeds
Snorted, by Myrmidons detain'd, and loosed
From their own master's chariot, foam'd to fly.

You will easily guess to what they belong; and I mention the circumstance merely in proof of my perpetual engagement to Homer, whether at home or abroad; for when I committed these lines to the back of your letter, I was rambling at a considerable distance from home. I set one foot on a mole-hill, placed my hat with the crown upward on my knee, laid your letter upon it, and with a pencil wrote the fragment that I have sent you. In the same posture I have written many and many a passage of a work which I hope soon to have done with. But all this is foreign to what I intended when I first took pen in hand. My

purpose then was to excuse my long silence as well as I could, by telling you that I am at present not only a labourer in verse, but in prose also, having been requested by a friend, to whom I could not refuse it, to translate for him a series of Latin letters received from a Dutch minister of the gospel at the Cape of Good Hope. With this additional occupation you will be sensible that my hands are full; and it is a truth that, except to yourself, I would, just at this time, have written to nobody. . . .

I am, like you and Mr. King, an admirer of clouds, but only when there are blue intervals, and pretty wide ones too, between them. One cloud is too much for me, but a hundred are not too many. So with this riddle and with my best respects to Mr. King, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's to you both, I remain, my dear Madam, truly yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 17, 1790.

My dear Coz—Here am I, at eight in the morning, in full dress, going a-visiting to Chicheley. We are a strong party, and fill two chaises; Mrs. F. the elder, and Mrs. G. in one; Mrs. F. the younger, and myself in another. Were it not that I shall find Chesters at the end of my journey, I should be inconsolable. That expectation alone supports my spirits; and even with this prospect before me, when I saw this moment a poor old woman coming up the lane opposite my window, I could not help sighing, and saying to myself—'Poor, but happy old woman! thou art exempted by thy situation in life from riding in chaises, and making thyself fine in a morning, happier therefore in my account than I, who am under the cruel necessity of doing both. Neither dost thou write verses, neither hast thou ever heard of the name Homer, whom I am miserable to abandon for a whole morning!' This, and more of the same sort, passed in my mind on seeing the old woman above-said. . . .

I have made two inscriptions lately at the request of Thomas Gifford, Esq., who is sowing twenty acres with acorns on one side of his house, and twenty acres with ditto on the other. He erects two memorials of stone on the occasion, that when posterity shall be curious to know the age of the oaks, their curiosity may be gratified.

My works therefore will not all perish, or will not all perish soon, for he has ordered his lapidary to cut the characters very deep, and in stone extremely hard. It is not in vain then, that I have so long exercised the business of a poet. I shall at least reap the reward of my labours, and be immortal probably for many years. —Ever thine, W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, June 22, 1790.

My dear Friend— . . . Villoison makes no mention of the serpent, whose skin, or bowels, or perhaps both, were honoured with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* inscribed upon them. But I have conversed with a living eye-witness of an African serpent long enough to have afforded skin and guts for the purpose. In Africa there are ants also, which frequently destroy these monsters. They are not much larger than ours, but they travel in a column of immense length, and eat through everything that opposes them. Their bite is like a spark of fire. When these serpents have killed their prey, lion, or tiger, or any other large animal, before they swallow him, they take a considerable circuit round about the carcase, to see if the ants are coming, because when they have gorged their prey, they are unable to escape them. They are nevertheless sometimes surprised by them in their unwieldy state, and the ants make a passage through them. Now if you thought your own story of Homer, bound in snake skin, worthy of three notes of admiration, you cannot do less than add six to mine, confessing at the same time, that if I put you to the expense of a letter, I do

not make you pay your money for nothing. But this account I had from a person of most unimpeached veracity.

I rejoice with you in the good Bishop's removal to St. Asaph, and especially because the Norfolk parsons much more resemble the ants above-mentioned than he the serpent. He is neither of vast size, nor unwieldy, nor voracious; neither, I dare say, does he sleep after dinner, according to the practice of the said serpent. But, harmless as he is, I am mistaken if his mutinous clergy did not sometimes disturb his rest, and if he did not find their bite, though they could not actually eat through him, in a degree resembling fire. Good men like him, and peaceable, should have good and peaceable folks to deal with, and I heartily wish him such in his new diocese. But if he will keep the clergy to their business, he shall have trouble, let him go where he may; and this is boldly spoken, considering that I speak it to one of that reverend body. But you are like Jeremiah's basket of figs. Some of you could not be better, and some of you are stark naught. Ask the bishop himself, if this be not true! W. C.

To Mrs. Bodham

Weston, June 29, 1790.

My dearest Cousin— . . . You must not suppose, my dear, that though I may be said to have lived many years with a pen in my hand, I am myself altogether at my ease on this tremendous occasion. Imagine rather, and you will come nearer to the truth, that when I placed this sheet before me I asked myself more than once, 'how shall I fill it?' One subject indeed presents itself, the pleasant prospect that opens upon me of our coming once more together; but that once exhausted, with what shall I proceed? Thus I questioned myself; but finding neither end nor profit of such questions, I bravely resolved to dismiss them all at once, and to engage in the great enterprise of a letter to my quondam Rose at a venture—There is great truth in a rant

of Nat. Lee's, or of Dryden's, I know not which, who makes an enamoured youth say to his mistress,

And nonsense shall be eloquence in love.

For certain it is, that they who truly love one another are not very nice examiners of each other's style or matter; if an epistle comes, it is always welcome, though it be perhaps neither so wise nor so witty as one might have wished to make it. And now, my Cousin, let me tell thee how much I feel myself obliged to Mr. Bodham for the readiness he expresses to accept my invitation. Assure him that, stranger as he is to me at present, and natural as the dread of strangers has ever been to me, I shall yet receive him with open arms, because he is your husband, and loves you dearly. That consideration alone will endear him to me, and I dare say that I shall not find it his only recommendation to my best affections. May the health of his relation (his mother I suppose) be soon restored, and long continued, and may nothing melancholy, of what kind soever, interfere to prevent our joyful meeting. Between the present moment and September our house is clear for your reception, and you have nothing to do but to give us a day or two's notice of your coming. In September we expect Lady Hesketh, and I only regret that our house is not large enough to hold all together, for were it possible that you could meet, you would love each other. . . .

My love to all the dear Donnes of every name!— Write soon, no matter about what. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

July 7, 1790.

Instead of beginning with the saffron vested morning to which Homer invites me, on a morning that has no saffron vest to boast, I shall begin with you. . . .

The French, who like all lively folks are extreme in everything, are such in their zeal for freedom; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so.

Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society: but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics; and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings as they have sometimes treated their idols. To these, however, they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a little English sobriety, and that they want extremely: I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Weston, July 8, 1790

My dear Johnny—You do well to perfect yourself on the violin. Only beware, that an amusement so very bewitching as music, especially when we produce it ourselves, do not steal from you ALL those hours that should be given to study. I can be well content that it should serve you as a refreshment after severer exercises, but not that it should engross you wholly. Your own good sense will most probably dictate to you this precaution, and I might have spared you the trouble of it; but I have a degree of zeal for your proficiency in more important pursuits, that would not suffer me to suppress it.

Having delivered my conscience by giving you this sage admonition, I will convince you that I am a censor not over and above severe, by acknowledging in the next place that I have known very good performers on the violin very learned also; and my cousin, Dr. Spencer Madan, is an instance.

I am delighted that you have engaged your sister to visit us; for I say to myself, if John be amiable, what must Catharine be? For we males, be we angelic as we may, are always surpassed by the ladies. But know this, that I shall not be in love with either of you, if you stay with us only a few days, for you talk of a week or so. Correct this erratum, I beseech you, and convince us by a much longer continuance here, that it was one. W. C.

Mrs. Unwin has never been well since you saw her. You are not passionately fond of letter-writing, I perceive, who have dropped a lady; but you will be a loser by the bargain; for one letter of hers in point of real utility and sterling value, is worth twenty of mine, and you will never have another from her, till you have earned it. W. C.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Weston, July 31, 1790.

You have by this time, I presume, answered Lady Hesketh's letter. If not, answer it without delay; and this injunction I give you, judging that it may not be entirely unnecessary; for though I have seen you but once, and only for two or three days, I have found out that you are a scatter-brain. I made the discovery perhaps the sooner, because in this you very much resemble myself, who in the course of my life have, through mere carelessness and inattention, lost many advantages; an insuperable shyness has also deprived me of many. And here again there is a resemblance between us. You will do well to guard against both, for of both, I believe, you have a considerable share as well as myself.

We long to see you again, and are only concerned at the short stay you propose to make with us. If time should seem to you as short at Weston, as it seems to us, your visit here will be gone 'as a dream when one awaketh, or as a watch in the night.'

It is a life of dreams, but the pleasantest one naturally wishes longest.

I shall find employment for you, having made already some part of the fair copy of the *Odyssey* a foul one. I am revising it for the last time, and spare nothing that I can mend. The *Iliad* is finished.

If you have Donne's poems, bring them with you, for I have not seen them many years, and should like to look them over.

You may treat us too, if you please, with a little of your music, for I seldom hear any, and delight much in it. You need not fear a rival, for we have but two fiddles in the neighbourhood—one a gardener's, the other a tailor's: terrible performers both! W. C.

To the Rev. William Bull

Weston, Sept. 8, 1790.

My dear Friend—We rejoice that, though unhorsed or rather horseless, you are come safe home again, and shall be happy to hear that you are mounted again, because our having the pleasure to see you here depends on it.

Mrs. Unwin, who is never well, is yet not worse than when you saw her last. As to myself, I am particularly frisky, having this very day sent all Homer to London.

Our joint best love attends yourself and family, and I am most truly yours, Wm. Cowper.

To Mrs. Bodham

Weston, Sept. 9, 1790.

My dearest Cousin—I am truly sorry to be forced after all to resign the hope of seeing you and Mr. Bodham at Weston this year; the next may possibly be more propitious, and I heartily wish it may. Poor Catharine's unseasonable indisposition has also cost us a disappointment, which we much regret; and were it not that Johnny has made shift to reach us, we should think ourselves completely unfortunate. But him we have, and him we will hold as long as we can, so expect

not very soon to see him in Norfolk. He is so harmless, cheerful, gentle, and good-tempered, and I am so entirely at my ease with him, that I cannot surrender him without a *needs must*, even to those who have a superior claim upon him. He left us yesterday morning, and whither do you think he is gone, and on what errand? Gone, as sure as you are alive, to London, and to convey my Homer to the bookseller's. But he will return the day after to-morrow, and I mean to part with him no more, till necessity shall force us asunder. Suspect me not, my Cousin, of being such a monster as to have imposed this task myself on your kind nephew, or even to have thought of doing it. It happened that one day, as we chatted by the fireside, I expressed a wish that I could hear of some trusty body going to London, to whose care I might consign my voluminous labours, the work of five years. For I purpose never to visit that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge, of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish, than offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that unreasonable as I thought it at first, to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone therefore with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity I think a freebooter would covet less. W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Sept. 17, 1790.

My dear Friend— . . . I devoutly second your droll wish, that the booksellers may contend about me. The more the better. Seven times seven, if they please; and let them fight with the fury of Achilles,

> Till every rubric-post be crimson'd o'er
> With blood of booksellers, in battle slain,
> For me, and not a periwig untorn.

Most truly yours, Wm. Cowper.

To Mrs. Bodham

Weston, Nov. 21, 1790.

My dear Coz—Our kindness to your nephew is no more than he must entitle himself to wherever he goes. His amiable disposition and manners will never fail to secure him a warm place in the affection of all who know him. The advice I gave respecting his poem on Audley End was dictated by my love of him, and a sincere desire of his success. It is one thing to write what may please our friends, who, because they are such, are apt to be a little biassed in our favour; and another to write what may please everybody; because they who have no connexion, or even knowledge of the author, will be sure to find fault if they can. My advice, however salutary and necessary as it seemed to me, was such as I dared not have given to a poet of less diffidence than he. Poets are to a proverb irritable, and he is the only one I ever knew who seems to have no spark of that fire about him. He has left us about a fortnight, and sorry we were to lose him; but had he been my son, he must have gone, and I could not have regretted him more. If his sister be still with you, present my love to her, and tell her how much I wish to see them at Weston together.

Mrs. Hewitt probably remembers more of my childhood, than I can recollect either of hers or my own; but this I recollect, that the days of that period were happy days, compared with most I have seen since. There are few perhaps in the world who have not cause to look back with regret on the days of infancy; yet, to say truth, I suspect some deception in this. For infancy itself has its cares; and though we cannot now conceive how trifles could affect us much, it is certain that they did. Trifles they appear now, but such they were not then. W. C.

To John Johnson, Esq.

MY BIRTHDAY

Friday, Nov. 26, 1790.

My dearest Johnny—I am happy that you have escaped from the claws of Euclid into the bosom of Justinian. It is useful I suppose to *every* man to be well grounded in the principles of jurisprudence; and I take it to be a branch of science, that bids much fairer to enlarge the mind, and give an accuracy of reasoning, than all the mathematics in the world. Mind your studies, and you will soon be wiser than I can hope to be.

We had a visit on Monday from one of the first women in the world; in point of character, I mean, and accomplishments, the Dowager Lady Spencer! I may receive perhaps some honours hereafter, should my translation speed according to my wishes, and the pains I have taken with it; but shall never receive any that I shall esteem so highly. She is indeed worthy to whom I should dedicate, and may but my *Odyssey* prove as worthy of her, I shall have nothing to fear from the critics.—Yours, my dear Johnny, with much affection,

W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, Dec. 1, 1790.

My dear Friend—It is plain that you understand trap, as we used to say at school: for you begin with accusing me of long silence, conscious yourself at the same time that you have been half a year in my debt, or thereabout. But I will answer your accusations with a boast of having intended many a day to write to you again, notwithstanding your long insolvency. Your brother and sister of Chicheley can both witness for me that, weeks since, I testified such an intention; and if I did not execute it, it was not for want of good-will, but for want of leisure. When will you be able to glory of such designs, so liberal and magnificent,—you,

who have nothing to do by your own confession but to grow fat and saucy? Add to all this, that I have had a violent cold, such as I never have but at the first approach of winter, and such as at that time I seldom escape. A fever accompanied it, and an incessant cough.

You measure the speed of printers, of my printer at least, rather by your own wishes than by any just standard. Mine, I believe, is as nimble a one as falls to the share of poets in general, though not nimble enough to satisfy either the author or his friends. I told you that my work would go to press in autumn, and so it did. But it had been six weeks in London ere the press began to work upon it. About a month since we began to print, and at the rate of nine sheets in a fortnight have proceeded to about the middle of the sixth *Iliad*. 'No further?' you say. I answer— No, nor even so far, without much scolding on my part both at the bookseller and the printer. But courage, my Friend! Fair and softly as we proceed, we shall find our way through at last; and in confirmation of this hope, while I write this, another sheet arrives. I expect to publish in the spring.

I love and thank you for the ardent desire you express to hear me bruited abroad, *et per ora virûm volitantem*. For your encouragement I will tell you that I read, myself at least, with wonderful complacence what I have done; and if the world, when it shall appear, do not like it as well as I, we will both say and swear with Fluellin, that it is an ass and a fool (look you!) and a prating coxcomb.

I felt no ambition of the laurel. Else, though vainly perhaps, I had friends who would have made a stir on my behalf on that occasion. I confess that when I learned the new condition of the office, that odes were no longer required, and that the salary was increased, I felt not the same dislike of it. But I could neither go to court, nor could I kiss hands, were it for a much more valuable consideration. Therefore never expect to hear that royal favours find out me!

Adieu, my dear old Friend! I will send you a mortuary copy soon, and in the meantime remain, ever yours, W. C.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Weston, Dec. 18, 1790.

I perceive myself so flattered by the instances of illustrious success mentioned in your letter, that I feel all the amiable modesty, for which I was once so famous, sensibly giving way to a spirit of vain-glory.

The King's College subscription makes me proud; the effect that my verses have had on your two young friends, the mathematicians, makes me proud; and I am, if possible, prouder still of the contents of the letter that you enclosed.

You complained of being stupid, and sent me one of the cleverest letters. I have not complained of being stupid, and have sent you one of the dullest. But it is no matter; I never aim at anything above the pitch of every day's scribble, when I write to those I love.

Homer proceeds, my boy! We shall get through it in time, and I hope by the time appointed. We are now in the tenth *Iliad*. I expect the ladies every minute to breakfast. You have their best love; mine attends the whole army of Donnes at Mattishall Green assembled. How happy should I find myself, were I but one of the party! My capering days are over;—but do you caper for me, that you may give them some idea of the happiness I should feel were I in the midst of them! W. C.

To Mr. Walter Churchey,

ATTORNEY-AT-LAW, HAY, BRECON

Weston Underwood, Dec. 24, 1790.

Dear Sir— . . . I never feel myself poor but when I see or hear of a valuable man whose exigencies exceed my ability to relieve them. How heartily and gladly I would administer to the complete removal of yours were it in my power, God knows. . . . Wm. Cowper.

To Mrs. King

Weston Underwood, Dec. 31, 1790.

My dear Madam—Returning from my walk at half-past three, I found your welcome messenger in the kitchen; and entering the study, found also the beautiful present with which you had charged him. We have all admired it (for Lady Hesketh was here to assist us in doing so); and for my own particular, I return you my sincerest thanks, a very inadequate compensation. Mrs. Unwin, not satisfied to send you thanks only, begs your acceptance likewise of a turkey, which, though the figure of it might not much embellish a counterpane, may possibly serve to swell the dimensions of a feather-bed.

I have lately been visited with an indisposition much more formidable than that which I mentioned to you in my last,—a nervous fever; a disorder to which I am subject, and which I dread above all others, because it comes attended by a melancholy perfectly insupportable. This is the first day of my complete recovery, the first in which I have perceived no symptoms of my terrible malady; and the only drawback on this comfort that I feel is the intelligence contained in yours, that neither Mr. King nor yourself are well. I dread always, both for my own health and for that of friends, the unhappy influences of a year worn out. But, my dear madam, this is the last day of it; and I resolve to hope that the new year shall obliterate all the disagreeables to the old one. I can wish nothing more warmly than that it may prove a propitious year to you.

My poetical operations, I mean of the occasional kind, have lately been pretty much at a stand. I told you, I believe, in my last, that Homer, in the present stage of the process, occupied me more intensely than ever. He still continues to do so, and threatens, till he shall be completely finished, to make all other composition impracticable. I have, however, written the mortuary verses as usual; but the wicked clerk for

whom I write them has not yet sent me the impression. I transmit to you the long-promised Catharina; and were it possible that I could transcribe the others, would send them also. There is a way, however, by which I can procure a frank, and you shall not want them long. . . . W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, Jan. 4, 1791.

My dear Friend— . . . The mention of quantity reminds me of a remark that I have seen somewhere, possibly in Johnson, to this purport,—that the syllables in our language being neither long nor short, our verse accordingly is less beautiful than the verse of the Greeks or Romans, because requiring less artifice in its construction. But I deny the fact, and am ready to depose on oath, that I find every syllable as distinguishably and clearly either long or short, in our language, as in any other. I know also that without an attention to the quantity of our syllables, good verse cannot possibly be written; and that ignorance of this matter is one reason why we see so much that is good for nothing. The movement of a verse is always either shuffling or graceful, according to our management in this particular, and Milton gives almost as many proofs of it in his *Paradise Lost* as there are lines in the poem. Away therefore with all such unfounded observation! I would not give a farthing for many bushels of them—nor you perhaps for this letter. Yet upon recollection, forasmuch as I know you to be a dear lover of literary gossip, I think it possible you may esteem it highly.—Believe me, my dear Friend, most truly yours, W. C.

To Mr. Johnson

[*No date.*]

I did not write the line that has been tampered with, hastily, or without due attention to the construction of

it; and what appeared to me its only merit is, in its present state, entirely annihilated.

I know that the ears of modern verse-writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the same squeamishness as themselves. So that if a line do not run as smooth as quicksilver they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post, and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly, rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods, that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them!

I have said thus much, as I hinted in the beginning, because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines, which an ear, so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration, would undoubtedly condemn; and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on a plum, which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But lest I tire you, I will only add, that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling; assuring you that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Weston, Jan. 21, 1791.

I know that you have already been catechized by Lady Hesketh on the subject of your return hither

before the winter shall be over, and shall therefore only say that, if you CAN COME, we shall be happy to receive you. Remember also that nothing can excuse the non-performance of a promise, but absolute necessity! In the meantime my faith in your veracity is such, that I am persuaded you will suffer nothing less than necessity to prevent it. Were you not extremely pleasant to us, and just the sort of youth that suits us, we should neither of us have said half so much, or perhaps a word on the subject.

Yours, my dear Johnny, are vagaries that I shall never see practised by any other; and whether you slap your ancle, or reel as if you were fuddled, or dance in the path before me, all is characteristic of yourself, and therefore to me delightful. I have hinted to you indeed sometimes, that you should be cautious of indulging antic habits and singularities of all sorts, and young men in general have need enough of such admonition. But yours are a sort of fairy habits, such as might belong to Puck or Robin Goodfellow, and therefore, good as the advice is, I should be half sorry should you take it.

This allowance at least I give you:—continue to take your walks, if walks they may be called, exactly in their present fashion, till you have taken orders. Then indeed, forasmuch as a skipping, curvetting, bounding divine might be a spectacle not altogether seemly, I shall consent to your adoption of a more grave demeanour. W. C.

To CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ.

Feb. 1, 1791.

You must know, my dear Rowley, that a man having two great volumes in the press is no more master of his time than the greatest man in the kingdom, and therefore, that though I have somewhat delayed my answer, I am clear of the charge to which you plead guilty, the charge of procrastination. . . .

I rejoice that you look so young. I too, I believe,

am older than I seem, or the ladies flatter me; and why they should, I know not, for I have long since ceased to be worthy of so much favour and goodness at their delicate hands. I would with all my heart that you were not still accompanied by the rheumatism, after so many years cohabitation; but it is better than the gout, and we must have something. *Felicissimus ille qui minimis urgetur.*

I can assure you, my dear old Friend, that a journey from Bath hither is not like a journey to the world's end; and the next time you visit the nymph of that spring, I shall hope that you will make the experiment. There is no creature whom I should receive with more true pleasure, for I am most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

To SAMUEL ROSE, ESQ.

The Lodge, Feb. 5, 1791.

My dear Friend— . . . Your very handsome present of Pope's Homer has arrived safe, notwithstanding an accident that befell him by the way. The Hall-servant brought the parcel from Olney, resting it on the pommel of the saddle, and his horse fell with him. Pope was in consequence rolled in the dirt, but being well coated got no damage. If augurs and soothsayers were not out of fashion, I should have consulted one or two of that order, in hope of learning from them that this fall was ominous. I have found a place for him in the parlour, where he makes a splendid appearance, and where he shall not long want a neighbour, one who, if less popular than himself, shall at least look as big as he. . . . W. C.

To LADY HESKETH

Feb. 13, 1791.

. . . *P.S.*—I cannot help adding a circumstance that will divert you. Martin having learned from Sam whose servant he was, told him that he had never seen Mr. Cowper, but he had heard him frequently spoken of by the companies that had called at his house, and

therefore, when Sam would have paid for his breakfast, would take nothing from him. Who says that fame is only empty breath? On the contrary, it is good ale, and cold beef into the bargain.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston Underwood, Feb. 26, 1791.

My dear Friend—

> It is a maxim of much weight,
> Worth conning o'er and o'er,
> He who has Homer to translate
> Had need do nothing more.

But nothwithstanding the truth and importance of this apophthegm, to which I lay claim as the original author of it, it is not equally true that my application to Homer, close as it is, has been the sole cause of my delay to answer you. No. In observing so long a silence I have been influenced much more by a vindictive purpose,—a purpose to punish you for your suspicion that I could possibly feel myself hurt or offended by any critical suggestion of yours, that seemed to reflect on the purity of my nonsense verses. Understand, if you please, for the future, that whether I disport myself in Greek or Latin, or in whatsoever other language, you are hereby, henceforth, and for ever, entitled and warranted to take any liberties with it, to which you shall feel yourself inclined, not excepting even the lines themselves which stand at the head of this letter.

You delight me when you call *blank* verse the English *heroic*; for I have always thought, and often said, that we have no other verse worthy to be so entitled. When you read my Preface you will be made acquainted with my sentiments on this subject pretty much at large; for which reason I will curb my zeal, and say the less about it at present. That Johnson, who wrote harmoniously in rhyme, should have had so defective an ear as never to have discovered any music at all in blank verse, till he heard a particular

friend of his reading it, is a wonder never sufficiently to be wondered at. Yet this is true on his own acknowledgement, and amounts to a plain confession (of which perhaps he was not aware when he made it), that he did not know how to read blank verse himself. In short, he either suffered prejudice to lead him in a string whithersoever it would, or his taste in poetry was worth little. I don't believe he ever read anything of that kind with enthusiasm in his life; and as good poetry cannot be composed without a considerable share of that quality in the mind of the author, so neither can it be read or tasted as it ought to be without it.

I have said all this in the morning fasting, but am soon going to my tea. When therefore I shall have told you that we are now, in the course of our printing, in the second book of the *Odyssey*, I shall only have time to add, that I am, my dear Friend, most truly yours, W. C.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Feb. 27, 1791.

Now, my dearest Johnny, I must tell thee in few words how much I love and am obliged to thee for thy affectionate services.

My Cambridge honours are all to be ascribed to you, and to you only. Yet you are but a little man; and a little man into the bargain who have kicked the mathematics, their idol, out of your study. So important are the endings which Providence frequently connects with small beginnings. Had you been here, I could have furnished you with much employment; for I have so dealt with your fair MSS. in the course of my polishing and improving, that I have almost blotted out the whole. Such, however, as it is, I must now send it to the printer, and he must be content with it, for there is not time to make a fresh copy. We are now printing the second book of the *Odyssey*. . . .

We are all as well as usual; that is to say, as well as

reasonable folks expect to be on the crazy side of this frail existence.

I rejoice that we shall so soon have you again at our fireside.

W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

Weston, March 6, 1791.

After all this ploughing and sowing on the plains of Troy, once fruitful, such at least to my translating predecessor, some harvest I hope will arise for me also. My long work has received its last, last touches; and I am now giving my preface its final adjustment. We are in the fourth *Odyssey* in the course of our printing, and I expect that I and the swallows shall appear together. They have slept all the winter, but I, on the contrary, have been extremely busy. Yet if I can *virûm volitare per ora* as swiftly as they through the air, I shall account myself well requited.—Adieu,

W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, March 18, 1791.

My dear Friend—I give you joy that you are about to receive some more of my elegant prose, and I feel myself in danger of attempting to make it even more elegant than usual, and thereby of spoiling it, under the influence of your commendations. But my old helter-skelter manner has already succeeded so well, that I will not even for the sake of entitling myself to a still greater portion of your praise, abandon it.

I did not call in question Johnson's true spirit of poetry, because he was not qualified to relish blank verse (though, to tell you the truth, I think that but an ugly symptom); but if I did not express it I meant, however, to infer it from the perverse judgement that he has formed of our poets in general; depreciating some of the best, and making honourable mention of others, in my opinion not undeservedly neglected. I will lay you sixpence that, had he lived in the days of Milton, and by any accident had met with his *Paradise*

Lost, he would neither have directed the attention of others to it, nor have much admired it himself. Good sense, in short, and strength of intellect, seem to me, rather than a fine taste, to have been his distinguished characteristics. But should you still think otherwise, you have my free permission; for so long as you have yourself a taste for the beauties of Cowper, I care not a fig whether Johnson had a taste or not. . . .

W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, March 24, 1791.

My dear Friend— . . . Your application to Dr. Dunbar reminds me of two lines to be found somewhere in Dr. Young:

> And now a poet's gratitude you see,
> Grant him two favours, and he'll ask for three.

In this particular therefore I perceive that a poet, and a poet's friend, bear a striking resemblance to each other. The Doctor will bless himself that the number of Scotch universities is not larger, assured that if they equalled those in England, in number of colleges, you would give him no rest till he had engaged them all. It is true, as Lady Hesketh told you, that I shall not fear in the matter of subscription a comparison even with Pope himself; considering (I mean) that we live in days of terrible taxation, and when verse, not being a necessary of life, is accounted dear, be it what it may, even at the lowest price. I am no very good arithmetician, yet I calculated the other day in my morning walk, that my two volumes, at the price of three guineas, will cost the purchaser less than the seventh part of a farthing per line. Yet there are lines among them that have cost me the labour of hours, and none that have not cost me some labour. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Friday night, March 25, 1791.

My dearest Coz—Johnson writes me word that he

has repeatedly called on Horace Walpole, and has never found him at home. He has also written to him, and received no answer. I charge thee therefore on thy allegiance, that thou move not a finger more in this business. My back is up, and I cannot bear the thought of wooing him any further, nor would do it, though he were as *pig* a gentleman (look you!) as Lucifer himself. I have Welsh blood in me, if the pedigree of the Donnes say true, and every drop of it says—'Let him alone!'

I should have dined at the Hall to-day, having engaged myself to do so; but an untoward occurrence, that happened last night, or rather this morning, prevented me. It was a thundering rap at the door, just after the clock struck three. First, I thought the house was on fire. Then I thought the Hall was on fire. Then I thought it was a housebreaker's trick. Then I thought it was an express. In any case I thought that if it should be repeated, it would awaken and terrify Mrs. Unwin, and kill her with spasms. The consequence of all these thoughts was the worst nervous fever I ever had in my life, although it was the shortest. The rap was given but once, though a multifarious one. Had I heard a second, I should have risen myself at all adventures. It was the only minute since you went, in which I have been glad that you were not here. Soon after I came down, I learned that a drunken party had passed through the village at that time, and they were no doubt the authors of this witty, but troublesome invention. . . .—Adieu, my dearest Coz.

W. C.

To Mrs. Throckmorton

April 1, 1791.

My dear Mrs. Frog—A word or two before breakfast; which is all that I shall have time to send you.—You have not, I hope, forgot to tell Mr. Frog how much I am obliged to him for his kind though unsuccessful attempt in my favour at Oxford. It seems not a little extraordinary, that persons so nobly

patronized themselves on the score of literature, should resolve to give no encouragement to it in return. Should I find a fair opportunity to thank them hereafter, I will not neglect it.

> Could Homer come himself, distress'd and poor,
> And tune his harp at Rhedycina's door,
> The rich old vixen would exclaim (I fear),
> 'Begone! no tramper gets a farthing here.'

I have read your husband's pamphlet through and through. You may think perhaps, and so may he, that a question so remote from all concern of mine could not interest me; but if you think so, you are both mistaken. He can write nothing that will not interest me; in the first place, for the writer's sake; and in the next place, because he writes better and reasons better than anybody,—with more candour, and with more sufficiency, and consequently with more satisfaction to all his readers, save only his opponents. They, I think, by this time wish that they had let him alone.

Tom is delighted past measure with his wooden nag, and gallops at a rate that would kill any horse that had a life to lose.—Adieu! W. C.

To the Rev. Mr. Hurdis

Weston, June 13, 1791.

My dear Sir— . . . I am glad to find that your amusements have been so similar to mine; for in this instance too I seemed to have need of somebody to keep me in countenance, especially in my attention and attachment to animals. All the notice that we lords of the creation vouchsafe to bestow on the creatures, is generally to abuse them: it is well therefore that here and there a man should be found a little womanish, or perhaps a little childish in this matter, who will make some amends, by kissing, and coaxing, and laying them in one's bosom. You remember the little ewe lamb, mentioned by the prophet Nathan; the prophet perhaps invented the tale for the sake of its application to David's conscience; but it is more

probable that God inspired him with it for that purpose. If He did, it amounts to a proof that He does not overlook, but on the contrary much notices such little partialities and kindness to His *dumb* creatures, as we, because we articulate, are pleased to call them.

Your sisters are fitter to judge than I, whether assembly rooms are the places of all others, in which the ladies may be studied to most advantage. I am an old fellow, but I had once my dancing days, as you have now; yet I could never find that I had learned half so much of a woman's real character by dancing with her, as by conversing with her at home, where I could observe her behaviour at the table, at the fireside, and in all the trying circumstances of domestic life. We are all good when we are pleased; but she is the good woman, who wants not a fiddle to sweeten her. . . .—With my love to your fair sisters, I remain, dear Sir, most truly yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, June 23, 1791.

Send me a draft, my dearest Coz, for as much money as I hope thou hast by this time received on my account, viz. from Anonymous, and viz. from W. Cowper, for we are driven to our last guinea. Let me have it by Sunday's post, lest we become absolutely insolvent.

> We have received beef, tongues, and tea,
> And certainly from none but thee;
> Therefore, with all our power of songs,
> Thanks for beef, and tea, and tongues!

As I said, so it proves. I told you that I should like our guests when they had been here a day or two, and accordingly I like them so well now that it is impossible to like them better. Mrs. Balls is an unaffected, plain-dressing, good-tempered, cheerful, motherly sort of a body, and has the affection of a parent for her niece and nephew. Her niece is an amiable young woman in all respects, a handsome likeness of Johnny, and with a smile so like my mother's, that in this cousin of

mine she seems almost restored to me again. I would that she had better health, but she has suffered sadly in her constitution by divers causes, and especially by nursing her father in his last illness, from whose side she stirred not till he expired. Johnny, with whom I have been always delighted, is also so much in love with me that no place in the world will suit him to live in at present, except Weston. Where he lives his sister will live likewise, and their aunt is under promise to live with them, at least till Catharine shall have attained under her tuition some competent share of skill in the art of house-keeping. They have looked at a house, the next but one to ours, and like it. You may perhaps remember it: it is an old house with *girt* casement windows, and has a fir-tree in the little court in front of it. Here they purpose to settle, if Aunt Bodham, who is most affectionately attached to them all, can be persuaded not to break her heart about it. Of this there are some hopes, because, did they live in Norfolk, they would neither live with her, nor even in her neighbourhood, but at thirty miles distance. Johnny is writing to her now with a view to reconcile her to the measure, and should he succeed, the house will be hired immediately. It will please thee, I think, to know that we are likely to have our solitary situation a little enlivened, and therefore I have given thee this detail of the matter. . . .—I remain, dearest Coz, ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

June 24, 1791.

My dear Friend— . . . You speak of your late loss in a manner that affected me much; and when I read that part of your letter, I mourned with you and for you. But surely, I said to myself, no man had ever less reason to charge his conduct to a wife with anything blameworthy. Thoughts of that complexion, however, are no doubt extremely natural on the occasion of such a loss; and a man seems not to have valued

sufficiently, when he possesses it no longer, what, while he possessed it, he valued more than life. I am mistaken, too, or you can recollect a time when you had fears, and such as became a Christian, of loving too much; and it is likely that you have even prayed to be preserved from doing so. I suggest this to you as a plea against those self-accusations, which I am satisfied that you do not deserve, and as an effectual answer to them all. You may do well, too, to consider, that had the deceased been the survivor, she would have charged herself in the same manner; and I am sure you will acknowledge, without any sufficient reason. The truth is, that you both loved at least as much as you ought, and I dare say had not a friend in the world who did not frequently observe it. To love just enough, and not a bit too much, is not for creatures who can do nothing well. If we fail in duties less arduous, how should we succeed in this, the most arduous of all? . . . —I remain sincerely yours, WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, June 26, 1791.

. . . It gives us true pleasure that you interest yourself so much in the state of our turnpike. Learn then the present state of it. From Gayhurst to Weston the road is a gravel-walk, but Weston itself is at present in a chaotic condition. About three weeks since they dug up the street, and having done so, left it. But it will not continue long in such disorder, and when you see it next you will find the village wonderfully improved. Already they have filled up two abominable ponds more fetid than any human nostrils could endure; they were to be found, as you must remember, one just under Farmer Archer's window, and the other a little beyond it. Covered drains are to be made wherever drains are wanted, and the causey is to be new-laid. When all this is done and the road well gravelled, we will hold our heads as high as any villagers in the kingdom. At the present time they are at work on the road from

Weston to Olney. Olney is also itself in a state of beautification, and the road between Olney and Bedford is, I believe, nearly finished, but that I have never seen. The sooner you come to look at these things with your own eyes, the better.

I have hardly left myself room to tell you a story which yet I must tell, but as briefly as possible. While I reposed myself yesterday evening in the shop of Mr. Palmer, lying at my length on the counter, a labouring man came in. He wanted a hat for his boy, and having bought one at two shillings, said he must have a handkerchief for himself, a silk one, to wear about his neck on Sundays. After much bargaining he suited himself with one at last for four shillings and sixpence. I liked the man's looks, and having just one shilling in my purse, I held it to him, saying: Here, honest friend, here's something toward paying for your purchase! He took the shilling and looked at me steadily for a long time, saying nothing. At last his surprise burst forth in these words—I never saw such a gentleman in my life! He then faced about, and was again for a long time silent; but at last, turning to me again he said—If I had known you had been so stout I would have had a better. Mr. Andrews told him that the cutting off would make no difference to him, and he might have a better if he pleased, so he took one at the price of five shillings, and went away all astonishment at my great bounty. I have learned since that he is a very worthy industrious fellow, and has a mother between seventy and eighty, who walks every Sunday eight miles to hearing, as they call it, and back again. This is another instance that my skill in physiognomy never deceives me.

Adieu, my dearest Coz. With the love of all here, I remain ever thine, WM. COWPER.

To MRS. BODHAM

Weston Underwood, July 7, 1791.

My dearest Cousin—Most true it is, however strange,

that on the twenty-fifth of last month I wrote you a long letter, and verily thought I had sent it. But opening my desk the day before yesterday, there I found it. Such a memory have I,—a good one never, but at present worse than usual, my head being filled with the cares of publication, and the bargain that I am making with my bookseller.

I am sorry that through this forgetfulness of mine you were disappointed, otherwise should not at all regret that my letter never reached you; for it consisted principally of such reasons as I could muster to induce you to consent to a favourite measure to which you have consented without them. Your kindness, and self-denying disinterestedness on this occasion have endeared you to us all, if possible, still the more, and are truly worthy of the Rose that used to sit smiling on my knee, I will not say how many years ago.

Make no apologies, my dear, that thou dost not write more frequently. Write when thou canst, and I shall be satisfied. I am sensible, as I believe I have already told you, that there is an awkwardness in writing to those with whom we have hardly ever conversed, in consideration of which I feel myself not at all inclined, either to wonder at or to blame your silence. At the same time be it known to you that you must not take encouragement from this my great moderation to write less frequently than you might, lest disuse increasing the labour, you should at last write not at all.

That I should visit Norfolk at present is not possible.—I have heretofore pleaded my engagement to Homer as the reason, and a reason it was, while it subsisted, that was absolutely insurmountable. But there are still other impediments which it would neither be pleasant to me to relate, nor to you to know, and which could not well be comprised in a letter. Let it suffice for me to say, that could they be imparted, you would admit the force of them. It shall be our mutual consolation, that if we cannot meet at Mattishall, at least we may meet at Weston, and that we shall meet here with double satisfaction, being now so numerous.

Your sister is well; Kitty I think better than when she came, and Johnny ails nothing, except that if he eat a little more supper than usual he is apt to be riotous in his sleep. We have an excellent physician at Northampton, whom our dear Catharine wishes to consult, and I have recommended it to Johnny to consult him at the same time. His nocturnal ailment is, I dare say, within the reach of medical advice, and because it may happen sometime or other to be very hurtful to him I heartily wish him cured of it. Light suppers and early rising perhaps might alone be sufficient;—but the latter is a difficulty that threatens not to be easily surmounted.

We are all of one mind respecting you, therefore I send the love of all, though I shall see none of the party till breakfast calls us together. Great preparation is making in the empty house. The spiders have no rest, and hardly a web is to be seen, where lately there were thousands.

I am, my dearest Cousin, with best respects to Mr. Bodham, most affectionately yours, Wm. Cowper.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, July 11, 1791.

My dearest Coz— . . . I am not much better pleased with that dealer in authors than yourself. His first proposal, which was to pay me with my own money, or in other words to get my copy for nothing, not only dissatisfied but hurt me, implying, as I thought, the meanest opinion possible of my labours. For that for which an intelligent man will give nothing, can be worth nothing. The consequence was that my spirits sank considerably below par, and have but just begun to recover themselves. His second offer, which is to pay all expenses, and to give me a thousand pounds next midsummer, leaving the copyright still in my hands, is more liberal. With this offer I have closed, and Mr. Rose will to-morrow clench the bargain. Josephus understands that Johnson will gain two

hundred pounds by it, but I apprehend that he is mistaken, and that Mr. Rose is right, who estimates his gains at one. Mr. Hill's mistake, if he be mistaken, arises from his rating the expenses of the press at only five hundred pounds, whereas Johnson rates them at six. Be that as it may, I am contented. If he gains two, I shall not grudge, and if he gains but one, considering all things, I think he will gain enough.

As to Sephus' scheme of signing the seven hundred copies in order to prevent a clandestine multiplication of them, at the same time that I feel the wisdom of it, I feel also an unsurmountable dislike of it. It would be calling Johnson a knave, and telling the public that I think him one. Now, though I do not perhaps think so highly of his liberality as some people do, and as I was once myself disposed to think, yet I have no reason at present to charge him with dishonesty. I must even take my chance, as other poets do, and if I am wronged, must comfort myself with what somebody has said,—that authors are the natural prey of booksellers.

Our affectionate hearts all lay themselves at your pettitoes, and with Mrs. Unwin's best remembrances, I remain, for my own peculiar, most entirely thine,

Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. William Bull

Weston, July 27, 1791.

My dear Mr. Bull—Mindful of my promise I take the pen, though fearing, and with reason enough, that the performance will be hardly worth the postage. Such as it is, however, here it comes, and if you like it not, you must thank yourself for it.

I have blest myself on your account that you are at Brighton and not at Birmingham, where it seems they are so loyal and so pious that they show no mercy to dissenters. How can you continue in a persuasion so offensive to the wise and good! Do you not yet perceive that the Bishops themselves hate you not more than the very blacksmith of the establishment, and will

you not endeavour to get the better of your aversion to red-nosed singing men and organs? Come—be received into the bosom of mother-church, so shall you never want a jig for your amusement on Sundays, and shall save perhaps your academy from a conflagration.

As for me, I go on at the old rate, giving all my time to Homer, who I suppose was a Presbyterian too, for I understand that the Church of England will by no means acknowledge him as one of hers. He, I say, has all my time, except a little that I give everyday to no very cheering prospects of futurity. I would I were a Hottentot, or even a dissenter, so that my views of an hereafter were more comfortable. But such as I am, hope, if it please God, may visit even me; and should we ever meet again, possibly we may part no more. Then, if Presbyterians ever find the way to heaven, you and I may know each other in that better world, and rejoice in the recital of the terrible things that we endured in this. I will wager sixpence with you now, that when that day comes, you shall acknowledge my story a more wonderful one than yours;—only order your executors to put sixpence in your mouth when they bury you, that you may have wherewithal to pay me.

I have received a long letter from an unknown somebody, filled with the highest eulogiums on my Homer. This has raised my spirits, and is the true cause of all the merriment with which I have greeted you this morning. Pardon me, as Vellum says in the Comedy, for being jocular. Mrs. Unwin joins me in love to yourself and your very good son, and we both hope and both sincerely wish to hear of Mrs. Bull's recovery.—Yours affectionately, WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, Aug. 2, 1791.

My dear Friend—I was much obliged, and still feel myself much obliged to Lady Bagot, for the visit with which she favoured me. Had it been possible that I

could have seen Lord Bagot too, I should have been completely happy. For, as it happened, I was that morning in better spirits than usual; and though I arrived late, and after a long walk, and extremely hot, which is a circumstance very apt to disconcert me, yet I was not disconcerted half so much as I generally am at the sight of a stranger, especially of a stranger lady, and more especially at the sight of a stranger lady of quality. When the servant told me that Lady Bagot was in the parlour I felt my spirits sink ten degrees; but the moment I saw her, at least when I had been a minute in her company, I felt them rise again, and they soon rose even above their former pitch. I know two ladies of fashion now, whose manners have this effect upon me. The Lady in question, and the Lady Spencer. I am a shy animal, and want much kindness to make me easy. Such I shall be to my dying day.

Here sit *I*, calling myself *shy*, yet have just published by the *by*, two great volumes of poe*try*.

This reminds me of Ranger's observation in the *Suspicious Husband*, who says to somebody, I forget whom:—'*There is a degree of assurance in you modest men, that we impudent fellows can never arrive at!*'—Assurance indeed! Have you seen 'em? What do you think they are? Nothing less I can tell you than a translation of Homer. Of the sublimest poet in the world. That's all. Can I ever have the impudence to call myself shy again? . . .—Ever yours, W. C.

To the Rev. Mr. Hurdis

Weston, Aug. 9, 1791.

My dear Sir—I never make a correspondent wait for an answer through idleness, or want of proper respect for him; but if I am silent it is because I am busy, or not well, or because I stay till something occurs, that may make my letter at least a little better than mere blank paper. I therefore write speedily in reply to

yours, being at present neither much occupied, nor at all indisposed, nor forbidden by a dearth of materials.

I wish always when I have a new piece in hand to be as secret as you, and there was a time when I could be so. Then I lived the life of a solitary, was not visited by a single neighbour, because I had none with whom I could associate; nor never had an intimate. This was when I dwelt at Olney; but since I have removed to Weston the case is different. Here I am visited by all around me, and study in a room exposed to all manner of inroads. It is on the ground floor, the room in which we dine, and in which I am sure to be found by all who seek me. They find me generally at my desk, and with my work, whatever it be, before me, unless perhaps I have conjured it into its hiding-place before they have had time to enter. This, however, is not always the case, and consequently, sooner or later, I cannot fail to be detected. Possibly you, who I suppose have a snug study, would find it impracticable to attend to anything closely in an apartment exposed as mine; but use has made it familiar to me, and so familiar, that neither servants going and coming disconcert me; nor even if a lady, with an oblique glance of her eye, catches two or three lines of my MS., do I feel myself inclined to blush, though naturally the shyest of mankind. . . . W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Aug. 30, 1791.

My dearest Coz—The walls of Ogressa's chamber shall be furnished as elegantly as they can be, and at little cost; and when you see them you shall cry—Bravo! Bedding we have, but two chairs will be wanting, the servants' hall having engaged all our supernumeraries. These you will either send or give us commission to buy them. Such as will suit may be found probably at Maurice Smith's, of house-furnishing memory; and this latter course I should think the best,

because they are of all things most liable to fracture in a wagon. . . .

I have spoken big words about Homer's fame, and bigger perhaps than my intelligence will justify, for I have not heard much, but what I have heard has been pretty much to the purpose. First, little Johnny going through Cambridge, in his way home, learned from his tutor there that it had found many admirers amongst the best qualified judges of that university, and that they were very liberal of their praises. Secondly, Mr. Rye wrote me word lately that a certain candid fair critic and excellent judge, of the county of Northampton, gives it high encomiums. Thirdly, Mr. Rye came over himself from Gayhurst yesterday on purpose to tell me how much he was delighted with it. He had just been reading the sixth *Iliad*, and comparing it with Pope and with the original, and professed himself enchanted. Fourthly, Mr. Frog is much pleased with it; and fifthly, Henry Cowper is bewitched with it; and sixthly, so are—you and I,—*ça suffit*.

But now if thou hast the faculty of erecting thy ears, lift them into the air, first taking off thy cap, that they may have the highest possible elevation. Mrs. Unwin says,—No, don't tell her ladyship all,—tell her only enough to raise her curiosity, that she may come the sooner to Weston to have it gratified. But I say,—Yes, I will tell her all, lest she should be overcharged and burst by the way.

The Chancellor and I, my dear, have had a correspondence on the subject of Homer. He had doubts it seems about the propriety of translating him in blank verse, and wrote to Henry to tell him so, adding a translation of his own in rhyme of the speech of Achilles to Phoenix, in the ninth book; and referring him to me, who, he said, could elevate it, and polish it, and give it the tone of Homer. Henry sent this letter to me, and I answered it in one to his lordship, but not meddling with his verses, for I remembered what happened between Gil Blas and the Archbishop of Toledo. His lordship sent me two sheets in reply,

filled with arguments in favour of rhyme, which I was to answer if I could; and containing another translation of the same passage, only in blank verse, leaving it to me to give it rhyme, to make it close, and faithful, and poetical. All this I performed as best I could; and yesterday I heard from him again. In this last letter he says,—'I am clearly convinced that Homer may be best translated *without* rhyme, and that you have succeeded in the passages I have looked into.'

Such is the candour of a wise man and a real scholar. I would to Heaven that all prejudiced persons were like him!—I answered this letter immediately; and here, I suppose, our correspondence ends. Have I not made a great convert? You shall see the letters, both his and mine, when you come. . . .—Adieu, my dearest Coz, ever thine, WM. COWPER.

To CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ.

Weston Underwood, Oct. 22, 1791.

My dear Rowley—How often am I to be mortified by hearing that you have been within sixty miles of me, and have taken your flight again to an immeasureable distance? Will you never in one of these excursions to England (three of which at least you have made since we have had intercourse by letter),—will you never find your way to Weston? Consider that we are neither of us immortal, and that if we do not contrive to meet before we are fifty years older, our meeting in this world at least will be an affair altogether hopeless; for by that time your travelling days will be over, as mine have been these many years. . . .

I have to tell you, in answer to your question, what I am doing,—that I am preparing to appear in a new character, not as an author, but as an editor;—editor of Milton's Poetical Works, which are about to be published in a more splendid style than ever yet. My part of the business is to translate the Latin and Italian pieces, to settle the text, to select notes from others

and to write notes of my own. At present the translation employs me; when that shall be finished, I must begin to read all the books that I can scrape together, of which either Milton or his works are the subject; and that done shall proceed to my commentary. Few people have studied Milton more, or are more familiar with his poetry, than myself; but I never looked into him yet with the eyes of an annotator: therefore whether I may expect much or little difficulty, I know no more than you do, but I shall be occupied in the business, no doubt, these two years. Fuseli is to be the painter, and will furnish thirty capital pictures to the engraver.

I have little poems in plenty, but nothing that I can send to Ireland, unless you could put me into a way of conveying them thither at free cost, for should you be obliged to pay for them, *le jeu ne vaudra pas les chandelles*. . . .—And believe me most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

Weston, Oct. 25, 1791.

My dear Friend — Your unexpected and transient visit, like everything else that is past, has now the appearance of a dream; but it was a pleasant one, and I heartily wish that such dreams could recur more frequently. Your brother Chester repeated his visit yesterday, and I never saw him in better spirits. At such times he has, now and then, the very look that he had when he was a boy; and when I see it, I seem to be a boy myself, and entirely forget for a short moment the years that have intervened since I was one. The look that I mean is one that you, I dare say, have observed.—Then we are at Westminster again. He left with me that poem of your brother Lord Bagot's, which was mentioned when you were here. It was a treat to me, and I read it to my cousin Lady Hesketh and to Mrs. Unwin, to whom it was a treat also. It has great sweetness of numbers, and much elegance of expression, and is just such a poem as I should be happy

to have composed myself about a year ago, when I was loudly called upon by a certain nobleman to celebrate the beauties of his villa. But I had two insurmountable difficulties to contend with. One was, that I had never seen his villa; and the other, that I had no eyes at that time for anything but Homer. Should I at any time hereafter undertake the task, I shall now at least know how to go about it, which, till I had seen Lord Bagot's poem, I verily did not. I was particularly charmed with the parody of those beautiful lines of Milton.

> The song was partial, but the harmony ——
> (What could it less, when spirits immortal sing?)
> Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
> The thronging audience.

There's a parenthesis for you! The parenthesis it seems is out of fashion, and perhaps the moderns are in the right to proscribe what they cannot attain to. I will answer for it that, had we the art at this day of insinuating a sentiment in this graceful manner, no reader of taste would quarrel with the practice. Lord Bagot showed his by selecting the passage for his imitation.

I would beat Warton if he were living, for supposing that Milton ever repented of his compliment to the memory of Bishop Andrewes. I neither do, nor can, nor will believe it. Milton's mind could not be narrowed by anything; and though he quarrelled with episcopacy in the Church of England idea of it, I am persuaded that a good bishop, as well as any other good man, of whatsoever rank or order, had always a share of his veneration. — Yours, my dear Friend, very affectionately, W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Nov. 16, 1791.

My dear Friend— . . . I was much pleased with your account of your visit to Cowslip Green; both for the sake of what you saw there, and because I am sure

you must have been as happy in such company, as any situation in this world can make you. Miss More has been always employed, since I first heard of her doings, as becomes a Christian. So she was, while endeavouring to reform the unreformable Great; and so she is, while framing means and opportunities to instruct the more tractable Little. Horace's *Virginibus puerisque*, may be her motto; but in a sense much nobler than he has annexed to it. I cannot, however, be entirely reconciled to the thought of her being henceforth silent, though even for the sake of her present labours. A pen useful as hers ought not, perhaps, to be laid aside; neither, perhaps, will she altogether renounce it, but when she has established her schools, and habituated them to the discipline she intends, will find it desirable to resume it.—I rejoice that she has a sister like herself, capable of bidding defiance to fatigue and hardship, to dirty roads and wet raiment, in so excellent a cause. . . .

I would that I could see some of the mountains which you have seen; especially, because Dr. Johnson has pronounced that no man is qualified to be a poet who has never seen a mountain. But mountains I shall never see, unless, perhaps, in a dream, or unless there are such in heaven. Nor those, unless I receive twice as much mercy as ever yet was shown to any man. . . . —Believe me most truly yours, WM. COWPER.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston Underwood, Dec. 5, 1791.

My dear Friend—Your last brought me two cordials, for what can better deserve that name than the cordial approbation of two such readers as your brother, the bishop, and your good friend and neighbour, the clergyman? The former I have ever esteemed and honoured with the justest cause, and am as ready to honour and esteem the latter as you can wish me to be, and as his virtues and talents deserve. Do I hate a parson? Heaven forbid! I love you all when you are good for

anything: and as to the rest, I would mend them if I could, and that is the worst of my intentions towards them. . . .—Adieu, my dear Friend, I am most sincerely yours, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

The Lodge, Dec. 21, 1791.

My dear Friend—It grieves me, after having indulged a little hope that I might see you in the holidays, to be obliged to disappoint myself. The occasion too is such as will ensure me your sympathy.

On Saturday last, while I was at my desk near the window, and Mrs. Unwin at the fireside, opposite to it, I heard her suddenly exclaim, 'Oh! Mr. Cowper, don't let me fall!' I turned and saw her actually falling, together with her chair, and started to her side just in time to prevent her. She was seized with a violent giddiness, which lasted, though with some abatement, the whole day, and was attended too with some other very, very alarming symptoms. At present, however, she is relieved from the vertigo, and seems in all respects better.

She has been my faithful and affectionate nurse for many years, and consequently has a claim on all my attentions. She has them, and will have them as long as she wants them; which will probably be, at the best, a considerable time to come. I feel the shock, as you may suppose, in every nerve. God grant that there may be no repetition of it. Another such a stroke upon her would, I think, overset me completely; but at present I hold up bravely. W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Weston, Jan. 1, 1792.

My dear Friend— . . . Mrs. Unwin is better, and I hope gathers strength daily. She rises not much later than her usual hour, and sits up till about eight in the evening, but does not yet leave her chamber. . . .

To the Lord Thurlow

[*No date.*]

My Lord—A letter reached me yesterday from Henry Cowper, enclosing another from your Lordship to himself, of which a passage in my work formed the subject. It gave me the greatest pleasure; your strictures are perfectly just, and here follows the speech of Achilles accommodated to them. . . .

I did not expect to find your Lordship on the side of rhyme, remembering well with how much energy and interest I have heard you repeat passages from the *Paradise Lost*, which you could not have recited as you did, unless you had been perfectly sensible of their music. It comforts me therefore to know that if you have an ear for rhyme, you have an ear for blank verse also.

It seems to me that I may justly complain of rhyme as an inconvenience in translation, even though I assert in the sequel that to me it has been easier to rhyme than to write without, because I always suppose a rhyming translator to ramble, and always obliged to do so. Yet I allow your Lordship's version of this speech of Achilles to be very close, and closer much than mine. But I believe that should either your Lordship or I give them burnish or elevation, your lines would be found, in measure as they acquired stateliness, to have lost the merit of fidelity. In which case nothing more would be done than Pope has done already.

I cannot ask your Lordship to proceed in your strictures, though I should be happy to receive more of them. Perhaps it is possible that when you retire into the country, you may now and then amuse yourself with my translation. Should your remarks reach me, I promise faithfully that they shall be all most welcome, not only as yours, but because I am sure my work will be the better for them.

With sincere and fervent wishes for your Lordship's health and happiness, I remain, my Lord, etc.

W. C.

To William Cowper, Esq.

FROM LORD THURLOW

[*No date.*]

Dear Cowper—On coming to town this morning, I was surprised particularly at receiving from you an answer to a scrawl I sent Harry, which I have forgot too much to resume now. But I think I could not mean to patronize rhyme. I have fancied that it was introduced to mark the measure in modern languages, because they are less numerous and metrical than the ancient; and the name seems to import as much. Perhaps there was melody in ancient song, without straining it to musical notes; as the common Greek pronunciation is said to have had the compass of five parts of an octave. But surely that word is only figuratively applied in modern poetry: euphony seems to be the highest term it will bear. I have fancied also, that euphony is an impression derived a good deal from habit, rather than suggested by nature; therefore in some degree accidental, and consequently conventional. Else why can't we bear a drama with rhyme; or the French, one without it? Suppose the *Rape of the Lock, Windsor Forest, L'Allegro, Il Penseroso,* and many other little poems which please, stripped of the rhyme, which might easily be done, would they please as well? It would be unfair to treat rondeaus, ballads, and odes in the same manner, because rhyme makes in some sort a part of the conceit. It was this way of thinking which made me suppose that habitual prejudice would miss the rhyme; and that neither Dryden or Pope would have dared to give their great authors in blank verse.

I wondered to hear you say you thought rhyme easier in original compositions; but you explained it, that you could go further a-field, if you were pushed for want of a rhyme. An expression preferred for the sake of the rhyme looks as if it were worth more than you allow. But to be sure in translation the necessity

of rhyme imposes very heavy fetters upon those who mean translation, not paraphrase. Our common heroic metre is enough, — the pure iambic, bearing only a sparing introduction of spondees, trochees, etc. to vary the measure.

Mere translation I take to be impossible, if no metre were required. But the difference of the iambic and heroic measure destroys that at once. It is also impossible to obtain the same sense from a dead language, and an ancient author, which those of his own time and country conceived; words and phrases contract, from time and use, such strong shades of difference from their original import. In a living language, with the familiarity of a whole life, it is not easy to conceive truly the actual sense of current expressions, much less of older authors. No two languages furnish *equipollent* words; their phrases differ, their syntax and their idioms still more widely. But a translation strictly so called requires an exact conformity in all those particulars, and also in numbers: therefore it is impossible. I really think at present, notwithstanding the opinion expressed in your Preface, that a translator asks himself a good question, How would my author have expressed the sentence I am turning, in English? for every idea conveyed in the original should be expressed in English, as literally and fully as the genius and use and character of the language will admit of.

In the passage before us ατται was the fondling expression of childhood to its parent; and to those who first translated the lines conveyed feelingly that amiable sentiment. Γεραιε expressed the reverence which naturally accrues to age.

Διοτρεφης implies an history. Hospitality was an article of religion, strangers were supposed to be sent by God, and honoured accordingly. Jove's altar was placed in ξενοδοχειον. Phoenix had been describing that as his situation in the court of Peleus: and his Διοτρεφες refers to it.—But you must not translate that literally—

Old daddy Phoenix, a God-send for us to maintain.

Precious limbs was at first an expression of great feeling; till vagabonds, draymen, etc. brought upon it the character of coarseness and ridicule.

It would run to great length, if I were to go through this one speech thus—this is enough for an example of my idea, and to prove the necessity of further deviation; which is still departing from the author, and justifiable only by strong necessity, such as should not be admitted, till the sense of the original had been laboured to the utmost, and been found irreducible.

I will end this by giving you the strictest translation I can invent, leaving you the double task of bringing it closer, and of polishing it into the style of poetry.

> Ah! Phoenix, aged Father, guest of Jove!
> I relish no such honours: for my hope
> Is to be honour'd by Jove's fated will,
> Which keeps me close beside these sable ships,
> Long as the breath shall in my bosom stay,
> Or as my precious knees retain their spring.
> Further I say,—and cast it in your mind!
> Melt not my spirit down by weeping thus,
> And wailing, only for that great man's sake,
> Atrides: neither ought you love that man,
> Lest I should hate the friend, I love so well.
> With me united 'tis your nobler part
> To gall his spirit, who has galled mine.
> With me reign equal, half my honours share.
> These will report; stay you here, and repose
> On a soft bed? and with the beaming morn
> Consult we, whether to go home, or stay.

I have thought that *hero* has contracted a different sense than it had in Homer's time, and is better rendered *great man*: but I am aware that the enclitics and other little words, falsely called expletives, are not introduced even so much as the genius of our language would admit. The euphony I leave entirely to you.—Adieu!

To the Lord Thurlow

[*No date.*]

My Lord—We are of one mind as to the agreeable effect of rhyme or euphony in the lighter kinds of poetry. The pieces which your Lordship mentions would certainly be spoiled by the loss of it, and so

would all such. The *Alma* would lose all its neatness and smartness, and *Hudibras* all its humour. But in grave poems of extreme length I apprehend that the case is different. Long before I thought of commencing poet myself, I have complained and heard others complain of the wearisomeness of such poems. Not that I suppose that tedium the effect of rhyme itself, but rather of the perpetual recurrence of the same pause and cadence, unavoidable in the English couplet.

I hope I may say truly, it was not in a spirit of presumption that I undertook to do what, in your Lordship's opinion, neither Dryden or Pope would have dared to do. On the contrary, I see not how I could have escaped that imputation, had I followed Pope in his own way. A closer translation was called for. I verily believed that rhyme had betrayed Pope into *his* deviations. For me therefore to have used his mode of versifying, would have been to expose myself to the same miscarriage, at the same time that I had not his talents to atone for it.

I agree with your Lordship that a translation perfectly close is impossible, because time has sunk the original strict import of a thousand phrases, and we have no means of recovering it. But if we cannot be unimpeachably faithful, that is no reason why we should not be as faithful as we can; and if blank verse afford the fairest chance, then it claims the preference.

Your Lordship, I will venture to say, can command me nothing in which I will not obey with the greatest alacrity.

Εἰ δύναμαι τέλεσαι γε καὶ ἐι τετελέσμενον εστι.

But when, having made as close a translation as even you can invent, you enjoin me to make it still closer, and in rhyme too, I can only reply, as Horace to Augustus,

> . . . cupidum, pater optime, vires
> Deficiunt. . . .

I have not treacherously departed from my pattern

that I might seem to give some proof of the justness of my own opinion, but have fairly and honestly adhered as closely to it as I could. Yet your Lordship will not have to compliment me on my success, either in respect of the poetical merit of many lines, or of their fidelity. They have just enough of each to make them deficient in the other.

> Oh Phœnix, father, friend, guest sent from Jove
> Me no such honours as they yield can move,
> For I expect my honours from above.
> Here Jove has fix'd me ; and while breath and sense
> Have place within me, I will never hence.
> Hear too, and mark me well—Haunt not mine ears
> With sighs, nor seek to melt me with thy tears
> For yonder chief, lest urging such a plea
> Through love of him, thou hateful prove to me.
> Thy friendship for thy friend shall brighter shine
> Wounding his spirit who has wounded mine.
> Divide with me the honours of my throne—
> These shall return, and make their tidings known :
> But go not thou !—thy couch shall here be dress'd
> With softest fleeces for thy easy rest,
> And with the earliest blush of opening day
> We will consult to seek our home, or stay.

Since I wrote these I have looked at Pope's. I am certainly somewhat closer to the original than he, but further I say not.—I shall wait with impatience for your Lordship's conclusions from these premises, and remain in the meantime with great truth, my Lord, etc. W. C.

To William Cowper, Esq.

from lord thurlow

[*No date.*]

Dear Cowper—I have received your letter on my journey through London, and as the chaise waits I shall be short.

I did not mean it as a sign of any presumption that you have attempted what neither Dryden nor Pope would have dared ; but merely as a proof of their addiction to rhyme ; for I am clearly convinced that Homer may be better translated than into rhyme, and that you have succeeded in the places I have looked into. But I have fancied that it might have been still

more literal, preserving the ease of genuine English and melody, and some degree of that elevation which Homer derives from simplicity. But I could not do it, or even near enough to form a judgement, or more than a fancy about it. Nor do I fancy it could be done '*stans pede in uno.*' But when the mind has been fully impregnated with the original passage, often revolving it and waiting for a happy moment may still be necessary to the best trained mind.—Adieu.

To the Lord Thurlow

[*No date.*]

My Lord—I haunt you with letters, but will trouble you now with a short line only to tell your Lordship how happy I am that any part of my work has pleased you.—I have a comfortable consciousness that the whole has been executed with equal industry and attention; and am, my Lord, with many thanks to you for snatching such a hasty moment to write to me, your Lordship's obliged and affectionate humble servant, Wm. Cowper.

To Thomas Park, Esq.

Weston Underwood, Feb. 19, 1792.

Dear Sir—Yesterday evening your parcel came safe to hand, containing the *Cursory Remarks,* Fletcher's *Faithful Shepperdesse,* and your kind letter, for all of which I am much obliged to you.

Everything that relates to Milton must be welcome to an editor of him; and I am so unconnected with the learned world that, unless assistance seeks *me,* I am not very likely to find it. Fletcher's work was not in my possession; nor, indeed, was I possessed of any other, when I engaged in this undertaking, that could serve me much in the performance of it. The various untoward incidents of a very singular life have deprived me of a valuable collection, partly inherited from my father, partly from my brother, and partly made by myself; so that I have at present fewer books than any man ought to have who writes for the public, especially

who assumes the character of an editor. At the present moment, however, I find myself tolerably well provided for this occasion by the kindness of a few friends, who have not been backward to pick from their shelves everything that they thought might be useful to me. I am happy to be able to number you among these friendly contributors.

You will add a considerable obligation to those you have already conferred, if you will be so good as to furnish me with such notices of your own as you offer. Parallel passages, or, at least, a striking similarity of expression, is always worthy of remark; and I shall reprint, I believe, all Mr. Warton's notes of that kind, except such as are rather trivial, and some, perhaps, that are whimsical, and except that I shall diminish the number of his references, which are not seldom redundant. Where a word only is in question, and that, perhaps, not an uncommon one in the days of Milton, his use of it proves little or nothing; for it is possible that authors writing on similar subjects may use the same words by mere accident. Borrowing seems to imply poverty, and of poverty I can rather suspect any man than Milton. But I have as yet determined nothing absolutely concerning the mode of my commentary, having hitherto been altogether busied in the translation of his Latin poems. These I have finished, and shall immediately proceed to a version of the Italian. They, being few, will not detain me long; and, when they are done, will leave me at full liberty to deliberate on the main business, and to plan and methodize my operations.

I shall be always happy in, and account myself honoured by, your communications, and hope that our correspondence thus begun will not terminate *in limine primo*.—I am, dear Sir, with much respect, your most obliged humble servant, Wm. Cowper.

To the Rev. John Newton

Feb. 20, 1792.

My dear Friend—When I wrote the lines in question,

I was, as I almost always am, so pressed for time, that I was obliged to put them down in a great hurry. Perhaps I printed them wrong. If a full stop be made at the end of the second line, the appearance of inconsistency, perhaps, will vanish: but should you still think them liable to that objection, they may be altered thus:—

> In vain to live from age to age
> We modern bards endeavour;
> But write in Patty's book one page,
> You gain your point for ever.

Trifling enough, I readily confess they are; but I have always allowed myself to trifle occasionally; and on this occasion had not, nor have at present, time to do more. By the way, should you think this amended copy worthy to displace the former, I must wait for some future opportunity to send you them properly transcribed for the purpose.

It is rather singular that the same post which brought me yours in which you express your disapprobation of this trifle, as such, brought me likewise a request from a very pious lady, that I would write for her a copy of verses on a pen stolen by a niece of hers, from the Prince of Wales' standish. I am obliged to comply, and consequently must trifle again;—and thus it fares with poets by profession. Our wits are not at our own command, but must of necessity be sometimes directed to such subjects, not as we should choose for ourselves, but as our friends are pleased to choose for us.

Your demand of more original composition from me, will, if I live, and it please God to afford me health, in all probability be sooner or later gratified. In the meantime, you need not,—and if you turn the matter in your thoughts a little, you will perceive that you need not,—think me unworthily employed in preparing a new edition of Milton. His two principal poems are of a kind that call for an editor who believes the gospel, and is well grounded in all evangelical doctrine. Such an editor they have never had yet, though only such a one can be qualified for the office. . . .—I am most truly yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To Mrs. King

Weston, March 8, 1792.

My dear Madam— . . . Mrs. Unwin, I thank God, is better; but still wants much of complete restoration. We have reached a time of life when heavy blows, if not fatal, are at least long felt. . . .

Almost immediately after the receipt of your last favour, I addressed myself to the subject you did me the honour to recommend to me, and produced the following stanzas. This will show at least the readiness with which my Muse undertakes to fulfil all commands from Pertenhall, which is the reason why I mention it.

ON A LATE THEFT

Sweet nymph, who art, it seems, accused
  Of stealing George's pen,
Use it thyself, and having used,
  E'en give it him again:

The plume of his, that has one scrap
  Of thy good sense express'd,
Will be a feather in his cap
  Worth more than all his *crest*.

Your approbation is all the fame I propose to myself on this occasion; for I wish to be known only to yourself and Mr. King as the author. Our united best compliments attend you both; and I am, my dear Madam, affectionately yours, W. C.

To Thomas Park, Esq.

Weston Underwood, March 10, 1792.

Dear Sir—You will have more candour, as I hope and believe, than to impute my delay to answer your kind and friendly letter to inattention or want of a cordial respect for the writer of it. To suppose any such cause of my silence were injustice both to yourself and me. The truth is, I am a very busy man, and cannot gratify myself with writing to my friends so punctually as I wish.

You have not in the least fallen in my esteem on

account of your employment, as you seemed to apprehend that you might. It is an elegant one, and, when you speak modestly, as you do, of your proficiency in it, I am far from giving you entire credit for the whole assertion. I had indeed supposed you a person of independent fortune, who had nothing to do but to gratify himself; and whose mind, being happily addicted to literature, was at full leisure to enjoy its innocent amusement. But it seems I was mistaken, and your time is principally due to an art which has a right pretty much to engross your attention, and which gives rather the air of an intrigue to your intercourse and familiarity with the Muses than a lawful connexion. No matter: I am not prudish in this respect, but honour you the more for a passion, virtuous and laudable in itself; and which you indulge not, I dare say, without benefit both to yourself and your acquaintance. I, for one, am likely to reap the fruit of your amours, and ought, therefore, to be one of the last to quarrel with them.

You are in danger, I perceive, of thinking of me more highly than you ought to think. I am not one of the *literati*, among whom you seem disposed to place me. Far from it. I told you in my last how heinously I am unprovided with the means of being so, having long since sent all my books to market. My learning accordingly lies in a very narrow compass. It is schoolboy learning somewhat improved, and very little more. From the age of twenty to thirty-three, I was occupied, or ought to have been, in the study of the law. From thirty-three to sixty I have spent my time in the country, where my reading has been only an apology for idleness, and where, when I had not either a magazine or a review in my hand, I was sometimes a carpenter, at others a bird-cage maker, or a gardener, or a drawer of landscapes. At fifty years of age I commenced an author. It is a whim that has served me longest and best, and which will probably be my last.

Thus you see I have had very little opportunity to become what is properly called—*learned*. In truth,

having given myself so entirely of late to poetry, I am not sorry for this deficiency, since great learning, I have been sometimes inclined to suspect, is rather a hindrance to the fancy than a furtherance.

You will do me a favour by sending me a copy of Thomson's monumental inscription. He was a poet for whose memory, as you justly suppose, I have great respect; in common, indeed, with all who ever read him with taste and attention.

Wishing you heartily success in your present literary undertaking,[1] and in all professional ones, I remain, dear Sir, with great esteem, sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

P.S.—After what I have said, I will not blush to confess, that I am at present perfectly unacquainted with the merits of Drummond, but shall be happy to see him in due time, as I should be to see any author edited by *you*.

To JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

Weston, March 11, 1792.

My dearest Johnny—You talk of primroses that you pulled on Candlemas Day; but what think you of me who heard a nightingale on New-year's Day? Perhaps I am the only man in England who can boast of such good fortune; good indeed, for if it was at all an omen it could not be an unfavourable one. The winter, however, is now making himself amends, and seems the more peevish for having been encroached on at so undue a season. Nothing less than a large slice out of the spring will satisfy him.

Lady Hesketh left us yesterday. She intended, indeed, to have left us four days sooner: but in the evening before the day fixed for her departure, snow enough fell to occasion just so much delay of it. . . .

W. C.

[1] The Poems of Drummond of Hawthornden.

To the Rev. John Newton

March 18, 1792.

My dear Friend—We are now once more reduced to our dual state; having lost our neighbours at the Hall, and our inmate Lady Hesketh. Mr. Rose, indeed, has spent two or three days here, and is still with us: but he leaves us in the afternoon. There are those in the world whom we love, and whom we are happy to see; but we are happy likewise in each other, and so far independent of our fellow mortals, as to be able to pass our time comfortably without them,—as comfortably, at least, as Mrs. Unwin's frequent indispositions, and my no less frequent troubles of mind, will permit. When I am much distressed, any company but hers distresses me more, and makes me doubly sensible of my sufferings; though sometimes, I confess, it falls out otherwise; and by the help of more general conversation, I recover that elasticity of mind which is able to resist the pressure. On the whole, I believe, I am situated exactly as I should wish to be, were my situation to be determined on by my own election; and am denied no comfort that is compatible with the total absence of the chief of all.

William Pearce called on me, I forget when,—but about a year ago. His errand was to obtain from me a certificate of his good behaviour during the time he had lived with us. His conduct in our service had been such, for sobriety and integrity, as entitled him to it; and I readily gave him one. At the same time, I confess myself not all surprised that the family to which you recommended him soon grew weary of him. He had a bad temper that always sat astride on a runaway tongue, and ceased not to spur and to kick it into all the sin and mischief that such an ungovernable member, so ridden, was sure to fall into. He had no sooner quitted us, which he did when he married, than he made even us, who had always treated him with kindness, a mark for his slanderous humour. What he said we know not, because we choose not to know; but such

things we were assured, and credibly too, as had we known them, would have been extremely offensive to us. Whether he be a Christian or not, is no business of mine to determine. There was a time when he seemed to have Christian experience, and there has been a much longer time in which, his attendance on ordinances excepted, he has manifested, I doubt, no one symptom of the Christian character. Prosperity did him harm: adversity, perhaps, may do him good. I wish it may; and if he be indeed a pupil of divine grace, it certainly will, when he has been sufficiently exercised with it; of which he seems, at present, to have a very promising prospect. . . .—I remain affectionately yours, WM. COWPER.

To LADY HESKETH

The Lodge, March 25, 1792.

My dearest Coz—Mr. Rose's longer stay than he at first intended was the occasion of the longer delay of my answer to your note, as you may both have perceived by the date thereof, and learned from his information. It was a daily trouble to me to see it lying in the window-seat, while I knew you were in expectation of its arrival. By this time I presume you have seen him, and have seen likewise Mr. Hayley's friendly letter and complimentary sonnet, as well as the letter of the honest Quaker; all of which, at least the two former, I shall be glad to receive again at a fair opportunity. Mr. Hayley's letter slept six weeks in Johnson's custody. It was necessary I should answer it without delay, and accordingly I answered it the very evening on which I received it, giving him to understand, among other things, how much vexation the bookseller's folly had cost me, who had detained it so long; especially on account of the distress that I knew it must have occasioned to him also. From his reply, which the return of the post brought me, I learn that in the long interval of my non-correspondence he had suffered anxiety and mortification enough; so much that I dare say he made

twenty vows never to hazard again either letter or compliment to an unknown author. What indeed could he imagine less, than that I meant by such an obstinate silence to tell him that I valued neither him nor his praises, nor his proffered friendship; in short that I considered him as a rival, and therefore, like a true author, hated and despised him? He is now, however, convinced that I love him, as indeed I do, and I account him the chief acquisition that my own verse has ever procured me. Brute should I be if I did not, for he promises me every assistance in his power. . . .

W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, April 6, 1792.

My dear Friend—God grant that this friendship of ours may be a comfort to us all the rest of our days, in a world where true friendships are rarities, and especially where suddenly formed they are apt soon to terminate! But, as I said before, I feel a disposition of heart toward you that I never felt for one whom I had never seen; and that shall prove itself, I trust, in the event a propitious omen. . . .

Horace says somewhere, though I may quote it amiss perhaps, for I have a terrible memory,—

> Utrumque nostrum incredibili modo
> Consentit astrum.——

* * * Our *stars consent*, at least have had an influence somewhat similar in another and more important article.——* * *

It gives me the sincerest pleasure that I may hope to see you at Weston; for as to any migrations of mine, they must, I fear, notwithstanding the joy I should feel in being a guest of yours, be still considered in the light of impossibilities. Come then, my friend, and be as welcome, as the country people say here, as the flowers in May; I am happy, as I say, in the expectation; but the fear, or rather the consciousness that I shall not answer on a nearer view, makes it a trembling kind of happiness, and a doubtful.

After the privacy which I have mentioned above, I went to Huntingdon; soon after my arrival there, I took up my quarters at the house of the Rev. Mr. Unwin; I lived with him while he lived, and ever since his death have lived with his widow. Her, therefore, you will find mistress of the house; and I judge of you amiss, or you will find her just such as you would wish. To me she has been often a nurse, and invariably the kindest friend through a thousand adversities that I have had to grapple with in the course of almost thirty years. I thought it better to introduce her to you thus, than to present her to you at your coming, quite a stranger.

Bring with you any books that you think may be useful to my commentatorship, for with you for an interpreter I shall be afraid of none of them. And in truth, if you think that you shall want them, you must bring books for your own use also, for they are an article with which I am *heinously unprovided*; being much in the condition of the man whose library Pope describes as

> No mighty store,
> His own works neatly bound, and little more!

You shall know how this has come to pass hereafter.

Tell me, my friend, are your letters in your own handwriting? If so, I am in pain for your eyes, lest by such frequent demands upon them I should hurt them. I had rather write you three letters for one, much as I prize your letters, than *that* should happen. And now for the present, adieu;—I am going to accompany Milton into the lake of fire and brimstone, having just begun my annotations. W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

April 15, 1792.

My dear Friend—I thank you for your remittance; which, to use the language of a song much in use when we were boys,

> Adds fresh beauties to the spring,
> And makes all nature look more gay

What the author of the song had particularly in view when he thus sang, I know not; but probably it was not the sum of fifty pounds; which, as probably, he never had the happiness to possess. It was, most probably, some beautiful nymph, — beautiful in his eyes, at least, — who has long since become an old woman.

I have heard about my wether mutton from various quarters. First, from a sensible little man, curate of a neighbouring village; then from Walter Bagot; then from Henry Cowper; and now from you. It was a blunder hardly pardonable in a man who has lived amid fields and meadows grazed by sheep, almost these thirty years. I have accordingly satirized myself in two stanzas which I composed last night while I lay awake, tormented with pain, and well dosed with laudanum. If you find them not very brilliant, therefore, you will know how to account for it.

Cowper had sinn'd with some excuse,
If, bound in rhyming tethers,
He had committed this abuse
Of changing ewes for wethers;

But, male for female is a trope,
Or rather bold misnomer,
That would have startled even Pope,
When he translated Homer.

Having translated all the Latin and Italian Miltonics, I was proceeding merrily with the *Commentary on the Paradise Lost*, when I was seized, a week since, with a most tormenting disorder; which has qualified me, however, to make some very feeling observations on that passage when I shall come to it:

——Ill fare our ancestor impure.

For this we may thank Adam;—and you may thank him too, that I am not able to fill my sheet, nor endure a writing posture any longer. I conclude abruptly, therefore; but sincerely subscribing myself, with my best compliments to Mrs. Hill, your affectionate,

Wm. Cowper.

To Lady Throckmorton

Weston, April 16, 1792.

My dear Lady Frog—I thank you for your letter, as sweet as it was short, and as sweet as good news could make it. You encourage a hope that has made me happy ever since I have entertained it. And if my wishes can hasten the event, it will not be long suspended. As to your jealousy, I mind it not, or only to be pleased with it. I shall say no more on the subject at present than this, that of all ladies living, a certain lady, whom I need not name, would be the lady of my choice for a certain gentleman, were the whole sex submitted to my election.

What a delightful anecdote is that which you tell me of a young lady detected in the very act of stealing our Catharina's praises; is it possible that she can survive the shame, the mortification of such a discovery? Can she ever see the same company again, or any company that she can suppose by the remotest possibility may have heard the tidings? If she can, she must have the assurance equal to her vanity. A lady in London stole my song on the broken Rose, or rather would have stolen, and have passed it for her own. But she too was unfortunate in her attempt; for there happened to be a female cousin of mine in company, who knew that I had written it. It is very flattering to a poet's pride, that the ladies should thus hazard everything for the sake of appropriating his verses. I may say with Milton, that I am fallen *on evil tongues and evil days*, being not only plundered of that which belongs to me, but being charged with that which does not. Thus it seems (and I have learned it from more quarters than one), that a report is, and has been some time current in this and the neighbouring counties, that though I have given myself the air of declaiming against the Slave Trade in *The Task*, I am in reality a friend to it; and last night I received a letter from Joe Rye, to inform me that I have been much traduced and calumniated on this account. Not knowing how I

could better or more effectually refute the scandal, I have this morning sent a copy [of verses] to the Northampton paper, prefaced by a short letter to the printer, specifying the occasion. The verses are in honour of Mr. Wilberforce, and sufficiently expressive of my present sentiments on the subject. You are a wicked fair one for disappointing us of our expected visit, and therefore out of mere spite I will not insert them. I have been very ill these ten days, and for the same spite's sake will not tell you what has ailed me. But lest you should die of a fright, I will have the mercy to tell you that I am recovering.

Mrs. G—— and her little ones are gone, but your brother is still here. He told me that he had some expectations of Sir John at Weston; if he come, I shall most heartily rejoice once more to see him at a table so many years his own. W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston, May 5, 1792.

My dearest Coz— . . . My correspondence with Hayley proceeds briskly, and is very affectionate on both sides. I expect him here in about a fortnight, and wish heartily, with Mrs. Unwin, that you would give him a meeting. I have promised him indeed that he shall find us alone, but you are one of the family.

I wish much to print the following lines in one of the daily papers. Lord S.'s vindication of the poor culprit in the affair of Cheit-Sing has confirmed me in the belief that he has been injuriously treated, and I think it an act merely of justice to take a little notice of him.

TO WARREN HASTINGS, ESQ.

BY AN OLD SCHOOLFELLOW OF HIS AT WESTMINSTER

Hastings! I knew thee young, and of a mind,
While young, humane, conversable, and kind;
Nor can I well believe thee, gentle THEN,
Now grown a villain, and the WORST of men;
But rather some suspect, who have oppress'd
And worried thee, as not themselves the BEST.

If thou wilt take the pains to send them to thy newsmonger, I hope thou wilt do well.—Adieu!

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston, May 24, 1792.

I wish with all my heart, my dearest Coz, that I had not ill news for the subject of the present letter. My friend, my Mary, has again been attacked by the same disorder that threatened me last year with the loss of her, and of which you were yourself a witness. Gregson would not allow that first stroke to be paralytic, but this he acknowledges to be so; and with respect to the former, I never had myself any doubt that it was; but this has been much the severest. Her speech has been almost unintelligible from the moment that she was struck; it is with difficulty that she opens her eyes, and she cannot keep them open, the muscles necessary to the purpose being contracted; and as to self-moving powers, from place to place, and the use of her right hand and arm, she has entirely lost them.

It has happened well, that of all men living the man most qualified to assist and comfort me is here, though till within these few days I never saw him, and a few weeks since had no expectation that I ever should. You have already guessed that I mean Hayley. Hayley who loves me as if he had known me from my cradle. When he returns to town, as he must, alas! too soon, he will pay his respects to you.

I will not conclude without adding that our poor patient is beginning, I hope, to recover from this stroke also; but her amendment is slow, as must be expected at her time of life and in such a disorder. I am as well myself as you have ever known me in a time of much trouble, and even better. . . . W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, May 26, 1792.

My dearest Cousin — Knowing that you will be anxious to learn how we go on, I write a few lines to

inform you that Mrs. Unwin daily recovers a little strength, and a little power of utterance; but she seems strongest, and her speech is more distinct, in a morning. Hayley has been all in all to us on this very afflictive occasion. Love him, I charge you, dearly for my sake. Where could I have found a man, except himself, who could have made himself so necessary to me in so short a time, that I absolutely know not how to live without him?

Adieu, my dear sweet Coz. Mrs. Unwin, as plainly as her poor lips can speak, sends her best love, and Hayley threatens in a few days to lay close siege to your affections in person. W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, June 4, 1792.

All's well; which words I place as conspicuously as possible, and prefix them to my letter, to save you the pain, my friend and brother, of a moment's anxious speculation. Poor Mary proceeds in her amendment still, and improves, I think, even at a swifter rate than when you left her. The stronger she grows, the faster she gathers strength, which is perhaps the natural course of recovery. She walked so well this morning, that she told me at my first visit she had entirely forgot her illness; and she spoke so distinctly, and had so much of her usual countenance, that, had it been possible, she would have made me forget it too.

Returned from my walk, blown to tatters—found two dear things in the study, your letter, and my Mary! She is bravely well, and your beloved epistle does us both good. I found your kind pencil note in my song-book, as soon as I came down on the morning of your departure; and Mary was vexed to the heart, that the simpletons who watched her supposed her asleep, when she was not; for she learned soon after you were gone, that you would have peeped at her, had you known her to have been awake. I perhaps might have had a peep too, and therefore was as vexed

as she; but if it please God, we shall make ourselves large amends for all lost peeps by and by at Eartham.

W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, June 5, 1792.

Yesterday was a noble day with us—speech almost perfect—eyes open almost the whole day, without any effort to keep them so: and the step wonderfully improved. But the night has been almost a sleepless one, owing partly I believe to her having had as much sleep again as usual the night before; for even when she is in tolerable health she hardly ever sleeps well two nights together. I found her accordingly a little out of spirits this morning, but still insisting on it that she is better. Indeed she always tells me so, and will probably die with those very words upon her lips. They will be true then at least, for then she will be best of all. . . . Had we eyes sharp enough, we should see the arrows of Death flying in all directions, and account it a wonder that we and our friends escape them a single day.

W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, June 7, 1792.

Of what materials can you suppose me made, if after all the rapid proofs that you have given me of your friendship, I do not love you with all my heart, and regret your absence continually? But you must permit me nevertheless to be melancholy now and then; or if you will not, I must be so without your permission; for that sable thread is so intermixed with the very thread of my existence, as to be inseparable from it, at least while I exist in the body. Be content therefore; let me sigh and groan, but always be sure that I love you! You will be well assured that I should not have indulged myself in this rhapsody about myself and my melancholy, had my present mood been of that complexion, or had not our poor Mary seemed

still to advance in her recovery. So in fact she does, and has performed several little feats to-day; such as either she could not perform at all, or very feebly, while you were with us.

I shall be glad if you have seen Johnny as I call him, my Norfolk cousin; he is a sweet lad, but as shy as a bird. It costs him always two or three days to open his mouth before a stranger; but when he does, he is sure to please by the innocent cheerfulness of his conversation. His sister too is one of my idols, for the resemblance she bears to my mother.

Mary and you have all my thoughts; and how should it be otherwise? She looks well, is better, and loves you dearly.—Adieu! my brother, W. C.

To the Rev. Thomas Carwardine

Weston Underwood, June 11, 1792.

My dear Carwardine—Sooner or later I must address you in that style, since it is impossible that I should love Hayley as I do and not be familiar with his dearest friend; for which reason I may as well begin now. I thank you for your most friendly letter, and for all your most friendly doings in favour of a poor solitary poet, who, till within these few days, had no hopes of service from anybody, except of such services as he has received from his own kindred, to whom he has been a burthen many years. But I owe them the justice to add that their kindness has not suffered them to think so.

My affairs have been in the best train possible since my dear brother bard and you have taken them in hand. He left London on Saturday, on which day I received a short note from him, dated the day before, beginning thus,—'Huzza! I have passed an agreeable hour from eight to nine this morning with the Chancellor. Left both him and Lord Kenyon, who was with us, so impressed with warm wishes to serve you, that I am persuaded your old friend Thurlow will accomplish it if possible.'

Thus stands the affair at present. My volumes, your noble gift to Miss Thurlow (noble I mean in respect of the intention of the giver), seem to have procured him this interview; for his first note, requesting an appointment to breakfast, remained unanswered so long that it seemed to be forgotten; but your present, which he found at Romney's, furnished him with a fair occasion for writing a second, and that second burst the barricado. If I succeed, therefore, I owe my fortunes to William of Eartham, and his friend of Colne, and if I do not succeed, shall always account myself as much indebted to them both as if I had. What dæmon could whisper in the Chancellor's ear that I am rich, I neither can guess nor wish to do it, but he was doubtless some dæmon who wished to starve me. Perhaps he will be disappointed, as all such dæmons should be.

I know well the Chancellor's benevolence of heart, and how much he is misunderstood by the world. When he was young he would do the kindest things, and at an expense to himself which at that time he could ill afford, and he would do them too in the most secret manner. I know not what is become of her now, but in those days there was a certain Miss Christian, the daughter, if I mistake not, of a Norfolk clergyman, who had been a friend of Thurlow's father. The girl was left penniless, and he established her in Tavistock Street as a milliner, disbursing three hundred pounds to furnish a shop for her. I went with him to the house, and, having seen her, am ready to swear that his motives were not, nor could be, of the amorous kind, for she was ugly to a wonder. No creature I believe knew anything of this *truly Christian* intrigue but myself only. When I think on these things, and hear them spoken of as I sometimes do

> .....vae meum
> Fervens difficile bile tumet jecur.

Many a time I have fought his battles, and some I have convinced of their error.

In answer to your benevolent inquiries concerning

my poor Mary, I have to tell you that her recovery proceeds *pedetentim tamen*, slowly, but as fast I suppose as, all things considered, I have any reason to expect. She now walks with very little support from one room to another, and articulates pretty intelligibly. She is this moment brought down into the study, and understanding that I am writing to you, says, a thousand thanks for me to Mr. Carwardine. Should we be so happy as to be able to emigrate in the autumn, you may depend on knowing when and by what route. In the meantime tell us by which we can approach you nearest.

Adieu—may God bless you and yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To Mr. Joseph Johnson, St. Paul's Church-Yard, London

Weston Underwood, July 8, 1792.

Dear Sir—

Truditur dies die,
Novaeque pergunt interire lunae.

Days, weeks, and months escape me, and nothing is done, nor is it possible for me to do anything that demands study and attention in the present state of our family. I am the electrician; I am the escort into the garden: I am wanted, in short, on a hundred little occasions that occur every day in Mrs. Unwin's present state of infirmity; and I see no probability that I shall be less occupied in the same indispensable duties for a long time to come. The time fixed in your proposals for publication meanwhile steals on; and I have lately felt my engagement for Milton bear upon my spirits with a pressure which, added to the pressure of some other private concerns, is almost more than they are equal to. Tell me if you expect to be punctual to your assignation with the public, and that the artists will be ready with their part of the business so soon as the spring of '94? I cannot bear to be waited for, neither shall I be able to perform my part of the work

with any success if I am hunted; and I ask this question thus early lest my own distress should increase, and should ultimately prove a distress to you. My translations are finished, and when I have finished also the revisal of them, will be, I believe, tolerably well executed. They shall be heartily at your service, if by this unhappy interception my time should be so shortened as to forbid my doing more.

Your speedy answer will oblige yours affectionately,

Wm. Cowper.

There is one Richard Coleman in the world, whom I have educated from an infant, and who is utterly good for nothing; but he is at present in great trouble, the fruit of his own folly. I send him, by this post, an order upon you for eight guineas.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, July 15, 1792.

The progress of the old nurse in Terence is very much like the progress of my poor patient in the road of recovery. I cannot indeed say that she moves, but advances not, for advances are certainly made, but the progress of a week is hardly perceptible. I know not therefore at present what to say about this long postponed journey. The utmost that is safe for me to say at this moment is this—You know that you are dear to us both; true it is that you are so, and equally true that the very instant we feel ourselves at liberty we will fly to Eartham. I have been but once within the Hall door since the Courtenays came home, much as I have been pressed to dine there, and have hardly escaped giving a little offence by declining it; but though I should offend all the world by my obstinacy in this instance, I would not leave my poor Mary alone. Johnny serves me as a representative, and him I send without scruple. As to the affair of Milton, I know not what will become of it. I wrote to Johnson a week since to tell him that the interruption of Mrs. Unwin's illness still continuing, and being likely to continue, I

know not when I should be able to proceed. The translations (I said) were finished, except the revisal of a part.

God bless your dear little boy and poet! I thank him for exercising his dawning genius upon me, and shall be still happier to thank him in person.

> Abbot is painting me so true,
> That (trust me) you would stare,
> And hardly know, at the first view,
> If I were here or there.

I have sat twice; and the few, who have seen his copy of me, are much struck with the resemblance. He is a sober, quiet man, which, considering that I must have him at least a week longer for an inmate, is a great comfort to me.

My Mary sends you her best love. She can walk now, leaning on my arm only, and her speech is certainly much improved. I long to see you. Why cannot you and dear Tom spend the remainder of the summer with us? We might then all set off for Eartham merrily together. But I retract this, conscious that I am unreasonable. It is a wretched world, and what we would, is almost always what we cannot.

Adieu! Love me, and be sure of a return.

W. C.

To Thomas Park, Esq.

Weston Underwood, July 20, 1792.

Dear Sir— . . . It was only one year that I gave to drawing, for I found it an employment hurtful to my eyes, which have always been weak and subject to inflammation. I finished my attempt in this way with three small landscapes, which I presented to a lady. These may, perhaps, exist, but I have now no correspondence with the fair proprietor. Except these, there is nothing remaining to show that I ever aspired to such an accomplishment.

The hymns in the Olney collection marked (C) are all of my composition, except one, which bears

that initial by a mistake of the printer. Not having the book at hand, I cannot now say which it is. . . .

I remain, dear Sir, much and sincerely yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston Underwood, July 21, 1792.

My dearest Coz—I am crazed with having much to do and doing nothing. Everything with me has fallen into arrear to such a degree that I almost despair of being able by the utmost industry to redeem the time that I have lost. With difficulty it is that I can steal even now a moment to address a few lines to thee. They must be as few as I can make them. Briefly therefore I say thus:

My portrait is nearly finished, an excellent one in my mind, and in the opinion of all who see it, both for drawing and likeness. It will be completed I believe on Monday. I shall keep it a short time after Abbot is gone, that my two or three friends in this neighbourhood may be gratified with a sight of it, and shall then send it to his house in Caroline Street, Bloomsbury, where it will remain some time. Should it be your wish to view it, you will then have an opportunity, and trust me I think it will afford you as much pleasure, nay, perhaps even more than a sight of the original myself; for you will see it with this thought in your mind, that whether I live or die, while this picture subsists, my charming lineaments and proportions can never be forgotten.

We have not even yet determined absolutely on our journey to Eartham, but shall I believe in two or three days decide in favour of it. Hayley interests himself so much in it, and I am persuaded that it bids fair to do us both so much good, that I am sincerely desirous of going. A thousand lions, monsters, and giants are in the way, but perhaps they will all vanish if I have but the courage to face them. Mrs. Unwin, whose weakness might justify her fears, has none.

Her trust in the providence of God makes her calm on all occasions. . . .

Adieu—must go to be painted—can't add another syllable, except that I am ever thine,

WM. COWPER.

P.S.—My dear Johnny sends his affectionate compliments. He goes with us;—all in a coach together, which Abbot will send us from town. To-morrow will be my last sitting, and I verily think the portrait, exclusive of the likeness, which is the closest imaginable, one of the best I ever saw. You will see by this *P.S.* that the journey is already determined on. Would to heaven that you could join us!

To WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, July 22, 1792.

This important affair, my dear brother, is at last decided, and we are coming. Wednesday se'nnight, if nothing occur to make a later day necessary, is the day fixed for our journey. Our rate of travelling must depend on Mary's ability to bear it. Our mode of travelling will occupy three days unavoidably, for we shall come in a coach. Abbot finishes my picture to-morrow; on Wednesday he returns to town, and is commissioned to order one down for us, with four steeds to draw it;

> ———hollow pamper'd jades of Asia,
> That cannot go but forty miles a day.

Send us our route, for I am as ignorant of it almost, as if I were in a strange country. We shall reach St. Albans, I suppose, the first day; say where we must finish our second day's journey, and at what inn we may best repose? As to the end of the third day, we know where that will find us, viz. in the arms and under the roof of our beloved Hayley.

General Cowper, having heard a rumour of this intended migration, desires to meet me on the road, that we may once more see each other. He lives at

Ham, near Kingston. Shall we go through Kingston, or near it? For I would give him as little trouble as possible, though he offers very kindly to come as far as Barnet for that purpose. Nor must I forget Carwardine, who so kindly desired to be informed what way we should go. On what point of the road will it be easiest for him to find us? On all these points you must be my oracle. My friend and brother, we shall overwhelm you with our numbers; this is all the trouble that I have left. My Johnny of Norfolk, happy in the thought of accompanying us, would be broken-hearted to be left behind.

In the midst of all these solicitudes I laugh to think what they are made of, and what an important thing it is for me to travel. Other men steal away from their homes silently, and make no disturbance; but when I move, houses are turned upside down, maids are turned out of their beds, all the counties through which I pass appear to be in an uproar. Surrey greets me by the mouth of the General, and Essex by that of Carwardine. How strange does all this seem to a man who has seen no bustle, and made none, for twenty years together!—Adieu, W. C.

To the Rev. William Bull

July 25, 1792.

My dear Mr. Bull—Engaged as I have been ever since I saw you, it was not possible that I should write sooner; and busy as I am at present, it is not without difficulty that I can write even now: but I promised you a letter, and must endeavour, at least, to be as good as my word. How do you imagine I have been occupied these last ten days? In sitting, not on cockatrice eggs, nor yet to gratify a mere idle humour, nor because I was too sick to move; but because my cousin Johnson has an aunt who has a longing desire of my picture, and because he would, therefore, bring a painter from London to draw it. For this purpose I have been sitting, as I say, these ten days; and am

heartily glad that my sitting time is over. You have now, I know, a burning curiosity to learn two things, which I may choose whether I will tell you or not. First, who was the painter; and secondly, how he has succeeded. The painter's name is Abbot. You never heard of him, you say. It is very likely; but there is, nevertheless, such a painter, and an excellent one he is. *Multa sunt quae bonus Bernardus nec vidit, nec audivit.* To your second inquiry I answer, that he has succeeded to admiration. The likeness is so strong, that when my friends enter the room where my picture is, they start, astonished to see me where they know I am not. Miserable man that you are, to be at Brighton instead of being here, to contemplate this prodigy of art, which, therefore, you can never see; for it goes to London next Monday, to be suspended awhile at Abbot's; and then proceeds into Norfolk, where it will be suspended for ever.

But the picture is not the only prodigy I have to tell you of. A greater belongs to me; and one that you will hardly credit, even on my own testimony. We are on the eve of a journey, and a long one. On this very day se'nnight we set out for Eartham, the seat of my brother bard, Mr. Hayley, on the other side of London, nobody knows where, a hundred and twenty miles off. Pray for us, my friend, that we may have a safe going and return. It is a tremendous exploit, and I feel a thousand anxieties when I think of it. But a promise, made to him when he was here, that we would go if we could, and a sort of persuasion that we can if we will, oblige us to it. The journey and the change of air, together with the novelty to us of the scene to which we are going, may, I hope, be useful to us both; especially to Mrs. Unwin, who has most need of restoratives. She sends her love to you and to Thomas, in which she is sincerely joined by your affectionate

W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, July 29, 1792.

Through floods and flames to your retreat
I win my desperate way,
And when we meet, if e'er we meet,
Will echo your huzza!

You will wonder at the word *desperate* in the second line, and at the *if* in the third; but could you have any conception of the fears I have had to battle with, of the dejection of spirits that I have suffered concerning this journey, you would wonder much more that I still courageously persevere in my resolution to undertake it. Fortunately for my intentions, it happens that as the day approaches my terrors abate; for had they continued to be what they were a week since, I must, after all, have disappointed you; and was actually once on the verge of doing it. I have told you something of my nocturnal experiences, and assure you now, that they were hardly ever more terrific than on this occasion. Prayer has, however, opened my passage at last, and obtained for me a degree of confidence, that I trust will prove a comfortable viaticum to me all the way. On Wednesday, therefore, we set forth.

The terrors, that I have spoken of, would appear ridiculous to most; but to you they will not, for you are a reasonable creature, and know well, that to whatever cause it be owing (whether to constitution, or to God's express appointment), I am hunted by spiritual hounds in the night season. I cannot help it. You will pity me, and wish it were otherwise; and though you may think there is much of the imaginary in it, will not deem it for that reason an evil less to be lamented. So much for fears and distresses. Soon I hope they shall all have a joyful termination, and I, my Mary, my Johnny, and my dog, be skipping with delight at Eartham.

Well! this picture is at last finished, and well finished, I can assure you. Every creature that has

seen it has been astonished at the resemblance. Sam's boy bowed to it, and Beau walked up to it wagging his tail as he went, and evidently showing that he acknowledged its likeness to his master. It is a half-length, as it is technically, but absurdly called; that is to say, it gives all but the foot and ankle. To-morrow it goes to town, and will hang some months at Abbot's, when it will be sent to its due destination in Norfolk.

I hope, or rather wish, that at Eartham I may recover that habit of study, which, inveterate as it once seemed, I now seem to have lost,—lost to such a degree, that it is even painful to me to think of what it will cost me to acquire it again.

Adieu! my dear, dear Hayley; God give us a happy meeting! Mary sends her love. She is in pretty good plight this morning, having slept well, and for her part has no fears at all about the journey.—Ever yours, W. C.

To Mr. Samuel Teedon of Olney

Eartham, near Chichester, Aug. 5, 1792.

Dear Sir—This journey, of which we all had some fears, and I a thousand, has by the mercy of God been happily and well performed, and we have met with no terrors by the way. I indeed myself was a little daunted by the tremendous height of the Sussex hills, in comparison of which all that I had seen elsewhere are dwarfs: but I only was alarmed; Mrs. Unwin had no such sensations, but was always cheerful from the beginning of our expedition to the end of it. At Barnet we found the inn so noisy that I was almost driven to despair by the dread that she would get no rest; but I was happily disappointed. She slept about four hours, and seemed as much refreshed as if she had slept twice as many. At Ripley, we had a silent inn, and rested well. The next day, but late, we arrived at Eartham; and now begin to feel ourselves, under the hospitable roof of our amiable friend, well

requited for all the fatigue, the heat, and the clouds of dust that we endured in the journey.

I had one glimpse—at least I was willing to hope it was a glimpse—of heavenly light by the way; an answer I suppose to many fervent prayers of yours. Continue to pray for us, and when anything occurs worth communicating let us know it.

Mrs. Unwin is in charming spirits, to which the incomparable air and delightful scenes of Eartham have much contributed. But our thanks are always due to the Giver of all good for these and all His benefits; for without His blessing Paradise itself would not cheer the soul that knows not Him.

Adieu. I am yours with many thanks for all your spiritual aids. WM. COWPER.

Mrs. Unwin sends her kind remembrances.

TO THE REV. MR. GREATHEED

Eartham, Aug. 6, 1792.

My dear Sir—Having first thanked you for your affectionate and acceptable letter, I will proceed, as well as I can, to answer your equally affectionate request that I would send you early news of our arrival at Eartham. Here we are in the most elegant mansion that I have ever inhabited, and surrounded by the most delightful pleasure grounds that I have ever seen; but which, dissipated as my powers of thought are at present, I will not undertake to describe. It shall suffice me to say that they occupy three sides of a hill, which in Buckinghamshire might well pass for a mountain, and from the summit of which is beheld a most magnificent landscape bounded by the sea, and in one part of it by the Isle of Wight, which may also be seen plainly from the window of the library in which I am writing.

It pleased God to carry us both through the journey with far less difficulty and inconvenience than I expected. I began it indeed with a thousand fears, and when we arrived the first evening at Barnet,

found myself oppressed in spirit to a degree that could hardly be exceeded. I saw Mrs. Unwin weary, as she might well be, and heard such a variety of noises, both within the house and without, that I concluded she would get no rest. But I was mercifully disappointed. She rested, though not well, yet sufficiently; and when we finished our next day's journey at Ripley, we were both in better condition, both of body and mind, than on the day preceding. At Ripley we found a quiet inn, that housed, as it happened, that night, no company but ourselves. There we slept well, and rose perfectly refreshed. And except some terrors that I felt at passing over the Sussex hills by moonlight, met with little to complain of till we arrived about ten o'clock at Eartham. Here we are as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us. It is almost a Paradise in which we dwell; and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive. Our host mentions you with great respect, and bids me tell you that he esteems you highly. Mrs. Unwin, who is, I think, in some points, already the better for her excursion, unites with mine her best compliments both to yourself and Mrs. Greatheed. I have much to see and enjoy before I can be perfectly apprised of all the delights of Eartham, and will therefore now subscribe myself, yours, my dear Sir, with great sincerity,

W. C.

To Mrs. Courtenay

Eartham, Aug. 12, 1792.

My dearest Catharina—Though I have travelled far, nothing did I see in my travels that surprised me half so agreeably as your kind letter; for high as my opinion of your good nature is, I had no hopes of hearing from you till I should have written first;—a pleasure which I intended to allow myself the first opportunity.

After three days confinement in a coach, and suffering as we went all that could be suffered from excessive heat

and dust, we found ourselves late in the evening at the door of our friend Hayley. In every other respect the journey was extremely pleasant. At the Mitre in Barnet, where we lodged the first evening, we found our friend Mr. Rose, who had walked thither from his house in Chancery Lane to meet us; and at Kingston, where we dined the second day, I found my old and much valued friend General Cowper, whom I had not seen in thirty years, and but for this journey should never have seen again. Mrs. Unwin, on whose account I had a thousand fears before we set out, suffered as little from fatigue as myself, and begins I hope already to feel some beneficial effects from the air of Eartham, and the exercise that she takes in one of the most delightful pleasure-grounds in the world. They occupy three sides of a hill, lofty enough to command a view of the sea, which skirts the horizon to a length of many miles, with the Isle of Wight at the end of it. The inland scene is equally beautiful, consisting of a large and deep valley well cultivated, and enclosed by magnificent hills, all crowned with wood. I had, for my part, no conception that a poet could be the owner of such a Paradise; and his house is as elegant as his scenes are charming.

But think not, my dear Catharina, that amidst all these beauties I shall lose the remembrance of the peaceful, but less splendid Weston. Your precincts will be as dear to me as ever, when I return; though when that day will arrive I know not, our host being determined, as I plainly see, to keep us as long as possible. Give my best love to your husband. Thank him most kindly for his attention to the old bard of Greece, and pardon me that I do not send you now an epitaph for Fop. I am not sufficiently recollected to compose even a bagatelle at present; but in due time you shall receive it.

Hayley, who will some time or other, I hope, see you at Weston, is already prepared to love you both, and being passionately fond of music, longs much to hear you.—Adieu! W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

Eartham, Aug. 16, 1792.

My dear Friend—I must be shorter than I would be, and must scribble as fast as I can, being wanted by Romney, who is here, and to whom I am sitting for my picture. . . .

To Mrs. Courtenay

Eartham, August 25, 1792.

Without waiting for an answer to my last, I send my dear Catharina the epitaph she desired, composed as well as I could compose it in a place where every object, being still new to me, distracts my attention, and makes me as awkward at verse as if I had never dealt in it. Here it is.

EPITAPH ON FOP

A DOG BELONGING TO LADY THROCKMORTON

Though once a puppy, and though Fop by name,
Here moulders one whose bones some honour claim.
No sycophant, although of spaniel race,
And though no hound, a martyr to the chase—
Ye squirrels, rabbits, leverets, rejoice,
Your haunts no longer echo to his voice;
This record of his fate exulting view,
He died worn out with vain pursuit of you.
'Yes (the indignant shade of Fop replies)—
And worn with vain pursuit Man also dies.'

I am here, as I told you in my last, delightfully situated, and in the enjoyment of all that the most friendly hospitality can impart; yet do I neither forget Weston, nor my friends at Weston; on the contrary, I have at length, though much and kindly pressed to make a longer stay, determined on the day of our departure,—on the 17th of September we shall leave Eartham; four days will be necessary to bring us home again, for I am under a promise to General Cowper to dine with him on the way, which cannot be done comfortably, either to him or to ourselves, unless we sleep that night at Kingston.

The air of this place has been, I believe, beneficial to us both. I indeed was in tolerable health before I set out, but have acquired since I came both a better appetite, and a knack of sleeping almost as much in a single night as formerly in two. Whether double quantities of that article will be favourable to me as a poet, time must show. About myself, however, I care little, being made of materials so tough, as not to threaten me even now, at the end of so many *lustrums*, with anything like a speedy dissolution. My chief concern has been about Mrs. Unwin, and my chief comfort at this moment is, that she likewise has received, I hope, considerable benefit by the journey.

Tell my dear George that I begin to long to behold him again; and did it not savour of ingratitude to the friend, under whose roof I am so happy at present, should be impatient to find myself once more under yours.

Adieu! my dear Catharina. I have nothing to add in the way of news, except that Romney has drawn me in crayons; by the suffrage of all here, extremely like.

W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Eartham, Aug. 26, 1792.

I know not how it is, my dearest Coz, but in a new scene, and surrounded by strange objects, I find my powers of thinking dissipated to a degree that makes it difficult to me even to write a letter, and even a letter to you; but such a letter as I can, I will, and have the fairest chance to succeed this morning, Hayley, Romney, Hayley's son, and Beau, being all gone together to the sea for bathing. The sea, you must know, is nine miles off, so that unless stupidity prevent, I shall have opportunity to write not only to you, but to poor Hurdis also, who is broken-hearted for the loss of his favourite sister, lately dead: and whose letter, giving an account of it, which I received yesterday, drew tears from the eyes of all our party. My only comfort respecting even yourself is, that you write in good spirits, and

assure me that you are in a state of recovery; otherwise I should mourn not only for Hurdis, but for myself, lest a certain event should reduce me, and in a short time too, to a situation as distressing as his; for though nature designed you only for my cousin, you have had a sister's place in my affections ever since I knew you. The reason is, I suppose, that having no sister, the daughter of my own mother, I thought it proper to have one, the daughter of yours. Certain it is, that I can by no means afford to lose you; and that unless you will be upon honour with me, to give me always a true account of yourself, at least when we are not together, I shall always be unhappy, because always suspicious that you deceive me.

Now for ourselves. I am, without the least dissimulation, in good health; my spirits are about as good as you have ever seen them; and if increase of appetite and a double portion of sleep be advantageous, such are the advantages that I have received from this migration. As to that gloominess of mind, which I have had these twenty years, it cleaves to me even here; and could I be translated to Paradise, unless I left my body behind me, would cleave to me even there also. It is my companion for life, and nothing will ever divorce us. So much for myself. Mrs. Unwin is evidently the better for her jaunt, though by no means as she was before the last attack; still wanting help when she would rise from her seat, and a support in walking; but she is able to use more exercise than she could at home, and moves with rather a less tottering step. God knows what He designs for me: but when I see those who are dearer to me than myself distempered and enfeebled, and myself as strong as in the days of my youth, I tremble for the solitude in which a few years may place me. I wish her and you to die before me, indeed, but not till I am more likely to follow immediately. Enough of this!

Romney has drawn me in crayons, and in the opinion of all here with his best hand, and with the most exact resemblance possible.

The 17th of September is the day on which I intend to leave Eartham. We shall then have been six weeks resident here; a holiday time long enough for a man who has much to do. And now farewell! W. C.

P.S.—Hayley, whose love for me seems to be truly that of a brother, has given me his picture, drawn by Romney about fifteen years ago;—an admirable likeness.

To Lady Hesketh

Eartham, Sept. 9, 1792.

My dearest Cousin—I determine, if possible, to send you one more letter, or at least, if possible, once more to send you something like one, before we leave Eartham. But I am in truth so unaccountably local in the use of my pen, that, like the man in the fable, who could leap well no where but at Rhodes, I seem incapable of writing at all, except at Weston. This is, as I have already told you, a delightful place; more beautiful scenery I have never beheld nor expect to behold; but the charms of it, uncommon as they are, have not in the least alienated my affections from Weston. The genius of that place suits me better,—it has an air of snug concealment, in which a disposition like mine feels itself peculiarly gratified; whereas here I see from every window woods like forests, and hills like mountains,—a wilderness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little. Accordingly, I have not looked out for a house in Sussex, nor shall. . . . W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

The Sun, at Kingston,
Sept. 18, 1792.

My dear Brother—With no sinister accident to retard or terrify us, we find ourselves, at a quarter before one, arrived safe at Kingston. I left you with

a heavy heart, and with a heavy heart took leave of our dear Tom, at the bottom of the chalk-hill. But soon after this last separation, my troubles gushed from my eyes, and then I was better.

We must now prepare for our visit to the General. I add no more, therefore, than our dearest remembrances and prayers that God may bless you and yours, and reward you an hundredfold for all your kindness. Tell Tom I shall always hold him dear for his affectionate attentions to Mrs. Unwin. From her heart the memory of him can never be erased. Johnny loves you all, and has a share in all these acknowledgements.—Adieu! W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Sept. 21, 1792.

My dear Hayley—Chaos himself, even the chaos of Milton, is not surrounded with more confusion, nor has a mind more completely in a hubbub, than I experience at the present moment. At our first arrival, after long absence, we find a hundred orders to servants necessary, a thousand things to be restored to their proper places, and an endless variety of minutiae to be adjusted; which, though individually of little importance, are most momentous in the aggregate. In these circumstances I find myself so indisposed to writing, that save to yourself I would on no account attempt it; but to you I will give such a recital as I can of all that has passed since I sent you that short note from Kingston, knowing that if it be a perplexed recital, you will consider the cause, and pardon it. I will begin with a remark, in which I am inclined to think you will agree with me, that there is sometimes more true heroism passing in a corner, and on occasions that make no noise in the world, than has often been exercised by those whom that world esteems her greatest heroes, and on occasions the most illustrious; I hope so at least; for all the heroism I have to boast, and all the opportunities I have of displaying any, are of a private nature. After

writing the note I immediately began to prepare for my appointed visit to Ham; but the struggles that I had with my own spirit, labouring as I did under the most dreadful dejection, are never to be told. I would have given the world to have been excused. I went, however, and carried my point against myself with a heart riven asunder. I have reasons for all this anxiety which I cannot relate now. The visit, however, passed off well, and we returned in the dark to Kingston. I with a lighter heart than I had known since my departure from Eartham,—and Mary too, for she had suffered hardly less than myself, and chiefly on my account. That night we rested well in our inn, and at twenty minutes after eight next morning set off for London; exactly at ten we reached Mr. Rose's door; we drank a dish of chocolate with him, and proceeded, Mr. Rose riding with us as far as St. Albans. From this time we met with no impediment. In the dark, and in a storm, at eight at night, we found ourselves at our own back door. Mrs. Unwin was very near slipping out of the chair in which she was taken from the chaise, but at last was landed safe. We all have had a good night, and are all well this morning.

God bless you, my dearest brother. W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Oct. 2, 1792.

My dear Hayley—A bad night, succeeded by an east wind, and a sky all in sables, have such an effect on my spirits, that if I did not consult my own comfort more than yours, I should not write to-day, for I shall not entertain you much; yet your letter, though containing no very pleasant tidings, has afforded me some relief. It tells me, indeed, that you have been dispirited yourself, and that poor little Tom, the faithful squire of my Mary, has been seriously indisposed: all this grieves me; but then there is a warmth of heart and a kindness in it, that do me good. I will endeavour not to repay you in notes of sorrow and despondence,

though all my sprightly chords seem broken. In truth, one day excepted, I have not seen the day when I have been cheerful, since I left you. My spirits, I think, are almost constantly lower than they were; the approach of winter is perhaps the cause; and if it is, I have nothing better to expect for a long time to come.

Yesterday was a day of assignation with myself, the day of which I said some days before it came, when that day comes I will begin my dissertations. Accordingly, when it came I prepared to do so; filled a letter-case with fresh paper, furnished myself with a pretty good pen, and replenished my ink-bottle; but partly from one cause, and partly from another, chiefly, however, from distress and dejection, after writing and obliterating about six lines, in the composition of which I spent near an hour, I was obliged to relinquish the attempt. An attempt so unsuccessful could have no other effect than to dishearten me; and it has had that effect to such a degree that I know not when I shall find courage to make another. At present I shall certainly abstain, since at present I cannot well afford to expose myself to the danger of a fresh mortification.

W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Oct. 13, 1792.

I began a letter to you yesterday, my dearest brother, and proceeded through two sides of the sheet; but so much of my nervous fever found its way into it, that looking it over this morning I determined not to send it.

I have risen, though not in good spirits, yet in better than I generally do of late, and therefore will not address you in the melancholy tone that belongs to my worst feelings.

I began to be restless about your portrait, and to say, How long shall I have to wait for it; I wished it here for many reasons: the sight of it will be a comfort to me, for I not only love, but I am proud of you, as of a conquest made in my old age. Johnny goes to town

on Monday, on purpose to call on Romney, to whom he shall give all proper information concerning its conveyance hither. The name of a man, whom I esteem as I do Romney, ought not to be unmusical in my ears; but his name will be so, till I shall have paid him a debt justly due to him, by doing such poetical honours to it as I intend. Heaven knows when that intention will be executed, for the Muse is still as obdurate and as coy as ever.

Your kind postscript is just arrived, and gives me great pleasure. When I cannot see you myself, it seems some comfort, however, that you have been seen by another known to me; and who will tell me in a few days that he has seen you. Your wishes to disperse my melancholy would, I am sure, prevail, did that event depend on the warmth and sincerity with which you frame them: but it has baffled both wishes and prayers, and those the most fervent that could be made, so many years, that the case seems hopeless. But no more of this at present.

Your verses to Austin are as sweet as the honey that they accompany;—kind, friendly, witty, and elegant. When shall I be able to do the like? Perhaps when my Mary, like your Tom, shall cease to be an invalid, I may recover a power at least to do something. I sincerely rejoice in the dear little man's restoration. My Mary continues, I hope, to mend a little.

W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Nov. 9, 1792.

My dear Friend—I wish that I were as industrious, and as much occupied as you, though in a different way; but it is not so with me. Mrs. Unwin's great debility (who is not yet able to move without assistance), is of itself a hindrance such as would effectually disable me. Till she can work and read, and fill up her time as usual (all which is at present entirely out of her power), I may now and then find time to write a letter, but I shall write nothing more. I cannot sit

with my pen in my hand, and my books before me, while she is in effect in solitude, silent, and looking at the fire. To this hindrance that other has been added, of which you are already aware,—a want of spirits, such as I have never known, when I was not absolutely laid by, since I commenced an author. How long I shall be continued in these uncomfortable circumstances is known only to Him who, as He will, disposes of us all. I may be yet able perhaps to prepare the first book of the *Paradise Lost* for the press, before it will be wanted; and Johnson himself seems to think there will be no haste for the second. But poetry is my favourite employment, and all my poetical operations are in the meantime suspended; for while a work to which I have bound myself remains unaccomplished I can do nothing else.

Johnson's plan of prefixing my phiz to the new edition of my Poems is by no means a pleasant one to me, and so I told him in a letter I sent him from Eartham, in which I assured him that my objections to it would not be easily surmounted. But if you judge that it may really have an effect in advancing the sale, I would not be so squeamish as to suffer the spirit of prudery to prevail in me to his disadvantage. Somebody told an author, I forget whom, that there was more vanity in refusing his picture, than in granting it; on which he instantly complied. I do not perfectly feel all the force of the argument, but it shall content me that he did.

I do most sincerely rejoice in the success of your publication, and have no doubt that my prophecy concerning your success in greater matters will be fulfilled. We are naturally pleased when our friends approve what we approve ourselves; how much then must I be pleased, when you speak so kindly of Johnny! I know him to be all that you think him, and love him entirely.

Adieu! We expect you at Christmas, and shall therefore rejoice when Christmas comes. Let nothing interfere.—Ever yours, W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Nov. 25, 1792.

How shall I thank you enough for the interest you take in my future Miltonic labours, and the assistance you promised me in the performance of them? I will some time or other, if I live, and live a poet, acknowledge your friendship in some of my best verse; the most suitable return one poet can make to another; in the meantime, I love you, and am sensible of all your kindness. You wish me warm in my work, and I ardently wish the same; but when I shall be so, God only knows. My melancholy, which seemed a little alleviated for a few days, has gathered about me again, with as black a cloud as ever; the consequence is absolute incapacity to begin.

I was for some years dirge-writer to the town of Northampton, being employed by the clerk of the principal parish there, to furnish him with an annual copy of verses proper to be printed at the foot of his bill of mortality; but the clerk died, and hearing nothing for two years from his successor, I well hoped that I was out of my office. The other morning, however, Sam announced the new clerk; he came to solicit the same service as I had rendered his predecessor, and I reluctantly complied; doubtful, indeed, whether I was capable. I have, however, achieved that labour, and I have done nothing more. I am just sent for up to Mary, dear Mary! Adieu! she is as well as when I left you, I would I could say better. Remember us both affectionately to your sweet boy, and trust me for being most truly yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Dec. 1, 1792.

I am truly glad, my dearest Coz, that the waters of Cheltenham have done thee good, and wish ardently that those of Bath may establish thy health, and prove the means of prolonging it many years, even till thou

shalt become what thou wast called at a very early age, an old wench indeed. I have been a *pauvre miserable* ever since I came from Eartham, and was little better while there, so that whatever motive may incline me to travel again hereafter, it will not be the hope that my spirits will be much the better for it. Neither was Mrs. Unwin's health so much improved by that frisk of ours into Sussex, as I had hoped and expected. She is, however, tolerably well, but very far indeed from having recovered the effects of her last disorder.

My birthday (the sixty-first that I have numbered) has proved for once a propitious day to me, for on that day my spirits began to mend, my nights became less hideous, and my days have been such of course.

I have heard nothing from Joseph, and having been always used to hear from him in November, am reduced to the dire necessity of supposing with you that he is heinously offended. Being in want of money, however, I wrote to him yesterday, and a letter which ought to produce a friendly answer; but whether it will or not is an affair, at present, of great uncertainty. Walter Bagot is offended too, and wonders that I would have any connexion with so bad a man as the author of the 'Essay on old Maids'[1] must necessarily be! Poor man! he has five sisters, I think, in that predicament, which makes *his* resentment rather excusable. Joseph, by the way, has two, and perhaps may be proportionally influenced by that consideration. Should that be the case, I have nothing left to do but to wish them all good husbands, since the reconciliation of my two friends seems closely connected with that contingency. . . .

The French are a vain and childish people, and conduct themselves on this grand occasion with a levity and extravagance nearly akin to madness; but it would have been better for Austria and Prussia to let them alone. All nations have a right to choose their own mode of government, and the sovereignty of the people is a doctrine that evinces itself; for whenever

[1] Hayley.

the people choose to be masters they always are so, and none can hinder them. God grant that we may have no revolution here, but unless we have a reform, we certainly shall. Depend upon it, my dear, the hour is come when power founded in patronage and corrupt majorities must govern this land no longer. Concessions too must be made to dissenters of every denomination. They have a right to them, a right to all the privileges of Englishmen, and sooner or later, by fair means or by force, they will have them. . . . —Ever thine, WM. COWPER.

To JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Weston, Dec. 16, 1792.

My dear Sir—We differ so little, that it is pity we should not agree. The possibility of restoring our diseased government is, I think, the only point on which we are not of one mind. If you are right, and it cannot be touched in the medical way, without danger of absolute ruin to the constitution, keep the doctors at a distance, say I—and let us live as long as we can. But perhaps physicians might be found of skill sufficient for the purpose, were they but as willing as able. Who are they? Not those honest blunderers the mob, but our governors themselves. As it is in the power of any individual to be honest if he will, any body of men are, as it seems to me, equally possessed of the same option. For I can never persuade myself to think the world so constituted by the author of it, and human society, which is his ordinance, so shabby a business, that the buying and selling of votes and consciences should be essential to its existence. As to multiplied representation, I know not that I foresee any great advantage likely to arise from that. Provided there be but a reasonable number of reasonable heads laid together for the good of the nation, the end may as well be answered by five hundred, as it would be by a thousand, and perhaps better. But then they should be honest as well as wise; and in order that they may be so, they should put it out of their own

power to be otherwise. This they might certainly do, if they would ; and would they do it, I am not convinced that any great mischief would ensue. You say, 'somebody must have influence,' but I see no necessity for it. Let integrity of intention and a due share of ability be supposed, and the influence will be in the right place, it will all centre in the zeal and good of the nation. That will influence their debates and decisions, and nothing else ought to do it. You will say perhaps that, wise men and honest men as they are supposed, they are yet liable to be split into almost as many differences of opinion as there are individuals : but I rather think not. It is observed of Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough, that each always approved and seconded the plans and views of the other ; and the reason given for it is, that they were men of equal ability. The same cause that could make two unanimous, would make twenty so ; and would at least secure a majority among as many hundreds. As to the reformation of the church, I want none, unless by a better provision for the inferior clergy : and if that could be brought about by emaciating a little some of our too corpulent dignitaries, I should be well contended.

The dissenters, I think, catholics, and others, have all a right to the privileges of all other Englishmen, because to deprive them is persecution ; and persecution on any account, but especially on a religious one, is an abomination. But after all, *valeat respublica*, I love my country, I love my king, and I wish peace and prosperity to Old England.—Adieu, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, Jan. 19, 1793.

Sufficiently apprised beforehand that my letter would not be worth more, I have waited till you might have it for a groat ; arriving on Monday, I conclude that it will find you in N. N. Street, and will find you I hope much improved in your health by the trip that you have made to Bath. On no other terms shall I fail

to hate the place that has deprived us of your company. You know not what you lose by being absent from Weston at this moment. We have just received from Johnny a cask of the best Holland gin, and in a few days I shall receive from Charlotte Smith a present of her novel, not yet published, entitled the *Old Manor House*, in three volumes. How happy wouldst thou find thyself in the enjoyment of both these articles at once! . . .

Mrs. Wright lately paid a morning visit at the Hall, and the Miss Knapps were with her. In their return they very kindly stopped at our door, to inquire after the health of me and Mrs. Unwin. I behaved, as usual, very ill on the occasion, and did not go out to speak to them; the reason, however, was that being just returned from my walk, and in my slippers, and the day being extremely raw and damp, and having, besides, an inflammation in my eyes, I was fearful of taking cold; and shouldst thou see any of the ladies in question, as I suppose thou wilt ere long, thou canst not do better than plead my excuse by telling them so. If I do a rude thing I have at least the virtue to be ashamed of it; which is some apology, and more than every clown can say.

Thou canst not do better than send me the draft immediately, for at this season of the year the money-birds are full fledged, and fly at an immoderate rate; whole flocks of them disappear in a moment. Unless thou tell me who they are that eat me up alive, I can say nothing about it. In fact, I am eaten up by nothing but an enormous taxation, which has doubled the price of everything within my memory; which makes it impossible for a man of small means like me, to live at all like a gentleman upon his income. Adieu, Mrs. U. sends her sincere love to you; she is as well as at any time since her last attack, and that is not much to boast of. When you went you took with you the key of the caddy. Bring it soon. I have a letter from Dublin about my Homer, which would do thy heart good.—Adieu. W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Jan. 20, 1793.

My dear Brother— . . . Had you come, and come without notice too, you would not have surprised us more, than (as the matter was managed) we were surprised at the arrival of your picture. It reached us in the evening, after the shutters were closed, at a time when a chaise might actually have brought you without giving us the least previous intimation. Then it was, that Samuel, with his cheerful countenance, appeared at the study door, and with a voice as cheerful as his looks, exclaimed, 'Mr. Hayley is come, Madam!' We both started, and in the same moment cried, 'Mr. Hayley come! and where is he?' The next moment corrected our mistake, and finding Mary's voice grow suddenly tremulous, I turned and saw her weeping.

I do nothing, nothwithstanding all your exhortations; my idleness is a proof against them all, or to speak more truly my difficulties are so. Something indeed I do. I play at pushpin with Homer every morning before breakfast, fingering and polishing, as Paris did his armour. W. C.

To John Johnson, Esq.

Jan. 31, 1793.

Io Paean!

My dearest Johnny—Even as you foretold, so it came to pass. On Tuesday I received your letter, and on Tuesday came the pheasants; for which I am indebted in many thanks, as well as Mrs. Unwin, both to your kindness and to your kind friend Mr. Copeman.

> In Copeman's ear this truth let Echo tell,—
> 'Immortal bards like mortal pheasants well':
> And when his clerkship's out, I wish him herds
> Of golden clients for his golden birds.

Our friends the Courtenays have never dined with us since their marriage, *because* we have never asked them;

and we have never asked them, *because* poor Mrs. Unwin is not so equal to the task of providing for and entertaining company as before this last illness. But this is no objection to the arrival here of a bustard; rather it is a cause for which we shall be particularly glad to see the monster. It will be a handsome present to *them*. So let the bustard come, as the Lord Mayor of London said to the hare, when he was hunting,—let her come, a' God's name: I am not afraid of her.

Adieu, my dear Cousin and caterer. My eyes terribly bad; else I had much more to say to you.—Ever affectionately yours, WM. COWPER.

To LADY HESKETH

Feb. 10, 1793.

My pens are all split and my inkglass is dry;
Neither wit, common sense, nor ideas have I.

In vain has it been that I have made several attempts to write, since I came from Sussex; unless more comfortable days arrive than I have the confidence to look for, there is an end of all writing with me. I have no spirits:—when the Rose came, I was obliged to prepare for his coming by a nightly dose of laudanum—twelve drops suffice; but without them, I am devoured by melancholy.

A propos of the Rose! His wife in her political notion is the exact counterpart of yourself—loyal in the extreme. Therefore, if you find her thus inclined, when you become acquainted with her, you must not place her resemblance to yourself to the account of her admiration of you, for she is your likeness ready made. In fact, we are all of one mind, about government matters, and notwithstanding your opinion, the Rose is himself a Whig, and I am a Whig, and you, my dear, are a Tory, and all the Tories nowadays call all the Whigs Republicans. How the deuce you came to be a Tory is best known to yourself; you have to answer for this novelty to the shades of your ancestors, who were always Whigs ever since we had any.—Adieu!

W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Feb. 24, 1793.

. . . Oh! you rogue! what would you give to have such a dream about Milton, as I had about a week since? I dreamed that being in a house in the city, and with much company, looking towards the lower end of the room from the upper end of it, I descried a figure which I immediately knew to be Milton's. He was very gravely, but very neatly attired in the fashion of his day, and had a countenance which filled me with those feelings that an affectionate child has for a beloved father, such, for instance, as Tom has for you. My first thought was wonder, where he could have been concealed so many years; my second, a transport of joy to find him still alive; my third, another transport to find myself in his company; and my fourth, a resolution to accost him. I did so, and he received me with a complacence, in which I saw equal sweetness and dignity. I spoke of his *Paradise Lost*, as every man must, who is worthy to speak of it at all, and told him a long story of the manner in which it affected me, when I first discovered it, being at that time a schoolboy. He answered me by a smile and a gentle inclination of his head. He then grasped my hand affectionately, and with a smile that charmed me, said, 'Well, you for your part will do well also'; at last recollecting his great age (for I understood him to be two hundred years old), I feared that I might fatigue him by much talking, I took my leave, and he took his, with an air of the most perfect good breeding. His person, his features, his manner, were all so perfectly characteristic, that I am persuaded an apparition of him could not represent him more completely. This may be said to have been one of the dreams of Pindus, may it not? . . .—With Mary's kind love, I must now conclude myself, my dear Brother, ever yours,

Lippus.

To William Cowper, Esq.

Eartham, March 4, 1793.

Honoured King of Bards—Since you deign to demand the observations of an humble and unexperienced servant of yours, on a work of one who is so much his superior (as he is ever ready to serve you with all his might), behold what you demand! but let me desire you not to censure me for my unskilful and perhaps (as they will undoubtedly appear to you) ridiculous observations; but be so kind as to receive them as a mark of respectful affection from your obedient servant,

Thomas Hayley.

Book.	Line.	
I. . . .	184. 195. 126.	I cannot reconcile myself to these expressions, 'Ah, cloth'd with impudence,' etc. 'Shameless wolf,' and 'Face of flint.'
I. . . .	503.	'Dishonour'd foul,' is, in my opinion, an uncleanly expression.
I. . . .	651.	'Reel'd,' I think makes it appear as if Olympus was drunk.
I. . .	749.	'Kindler of the fires in heaven,' I think makes Jupiter appear too much like a lamplighter.
II. . . .	317 to 319.	These lines are in my opinion, below the elevated genius of Mr. Cowper.
XVIII. . . .	300 to 304.	This appears to me to be rather Irish, since in line 300 you say, 'No one sat, and in 304, 'Polydamus rose.'

To Mr. Thomas Hayley

Weston, March 14, 1793.

My dear little Critic—I thank you heartily for your observations, on which I set a higher value, because they have instructed me as much, and have entertained me more than all the other strictures of our public judges in these matters. Perhaps I am not much more pleased with *shameless wolf*, etc. than you. But what is to be done, my little man? Coarse as the expressions are, they are no more than equivalent to those of Homer. The invective of the ancients was never tempered with good manners, as your papa can tell you; and my business, you know, is, not to be more polite than my author, but to represent him as closely as I can.

Dishonour'd foul I have wiped away, for the reason you give, which is a very just one, and the present reading is this,

> Who hath dared dishonour thus
> The life itself, etc.

Your objection to *kindler of the fires of Heaven* I had the good fortune to anticipate, and expunged the dirty ambiguity some time since, wondering not a little that I had ever admitted it.

The fault you find with the two first verses of Nestor's speech discovers such a degree of just discernment, that but for your papa's assurance to the contrary, I must have suspected *him* as the author of that remark; much as I should have respected it, if it had been so, I value it I assure you, my little friend, still more as yours. In the new edition the passage will be found thus altered,

> Alas! great sorrow falls on Greece to-day,
> Priam, and Priam's sons with all in Troy——
> Oh! how will they exult, and in their hearts
> Triumph, once hearing of this broil between
> The prime of Greece, in council, and in arms.

Where the word *reel* suggests to you the idea of a drunken mountain, it performs the service to which I destined it. It is a bold metaphor; but justified by one of the sublimest passages in Scripture, compared with the sublimity of which even that of Homer suffers humiliation.

It is God himself, who, speaking, I think, by the prophet Isaiah, says,

> The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard.

With equal boldness in the same Scripture, the poetry of which was never equalled, mountains are said to skip, to break out into singing, and the fields to clap their hands. I intend, therefore, that my Olympus shall be still tipsy.

The accuracy of your last remark, in which you convicted me of a bull, delights me. A fig for all

critics but you! The blockheads could not find it. It shall stand thus,

First spake Polydamus———

Homer was more upon his guard, than to commit such a blunder, for he says,

ἦρχ' ἀγορεύειν.

And now, my dear little censor, once more accept my thanks. I only regret that your strictures are so few, being just and sensible as they are.

Tell your papa that he shall hear from me soon; accept mine, and my dear invalid's affectionate remembrances.—Ever yours, W. C.

To Joseph Hill, Esq.

March 29, 1793.

My dear Friend—Your tidings concerning the slender pittance yet to come, are, as you observe, of the melancholy cast. Not being gifted by nature with the means of acquiring much, it is well, however, that she has given me a disposition to be contented with little. I have now been so many years habituated to small matters, that I should probably find myself incommoded by greater; and may I but be enabled to shift, as I have been hitherto, unsatisfied wishes will never trouble me much. My pen has helped me somewhat; and, after some years' toil, I begin to reap the benefit. Had I begun sooner, perhaps I should have known fewer pecuniary distresses; or, who can say? It is possible that I might not have succeeded so well. Fruit ripens only a short time before it rots; and man, in general, arrives not at maturity of mental powers at a much earlier period. I am now busied in preparing Homer for his second appearance. An author should consider himself as bound not to please himself, but the public; and so far as the good pleasure of the public may be learned from the critics, I design to accommodate myself to it. The Latinisms, though employed by Milton, and numbered by Addison among the arts

and expedients by which he has given dignity to his style, I shall render into plain English; the rougher lines, though my reason for using them has never been proved a bad one, so far as I know, I shall make perfectly smooth; and shall give body and substance to all that is in any degree feeble and flimsy. And when I have done all this, and more, if the critics still grumble, I shall say the very deuce is in them. Yet that they will grumble, I make no doubt; for, unreasonable as it is to do so, they all require something better than Homer, and that something they will certainly never get from me.

As to the canal that is to be my neighbour, I hear little about it. The Courtenays of Weston have nothing to do with it, and I have no intercourse with Tyringham. When it is finished, the people of these parts will have to carry their coals seven miles only, which now they bring from Northampton or Bedford, both at the distance of fifteen. But, as Balaam says, who shall live when these things are done? It is not for me, a sexagenarian already, to expect that I shall. The chief objection to canals in general seems to be, that, multiplying as they do, they are likely to swallow the coasting trade.

I cannot tell you the joy I feel at the disappointment of the French; pitiful mimics of Spartan and Roman virtue, without a grain of it in their whole character. —Ever yours, WM. COWPER.

To JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

The Lodge, April 11, 1793.

My dearest Johnny— . . . Fear not, my man. You will acquit yourself very well, I dare say, both in standing for your degree, and when you have gained it. A little tremor, and a little shamefacedness in a stripling, like you, are recommendations rather than otherwise; and so they ought to be, being symptoms of an ingenuous mind rather unfrequent in this age of brass.

What you say of your determined purpose, with God's help, to take up the Cross, and despise the shame, gives us both real pleasure. In our pedigree is found one at least who did it before you. Do you the like, and you will meet him in heaven, as sure as the Scripture is the Word of God.

The quarrel that the world has with evangelic men and doctrines, they would have with a host of angels in the human form: for it is the quarrel of owls with sunshine; of ignorance with divine illumination.

Adieu, my dear Johnny! We shall expect you with earnest desire of your coming, and receive you with much delight. W. C.

To the Rev. John Newton

April 25, 1793.

My dear Friend—Had it not been stipulated between us that, being both at present pretty much engrossed by business, we should write when opportunity offers, I should be frighted at the date of your last: but you will not judge me, I know, by the unfrequency of my letters, nor suppose that my thoughts about you are equally unfrequent. In truth they are not. No day passes in which you are excluded from them. I am so busy that I do not expect even now to fill my paper. While I write, my poor invalid, who is still unable to amuse herself either with book or needle, sits silent at my side; which makes me, in all my letters, hasten to a conclusion. My only time for study is now before breakfast; and I lengthen it as much as I can by rising early. . . .—I remain sincerely yours, W. C.

To the Rev. Walter Bagot

Weston, May 4, 1793.

My dear Friend—While your sorrow for our common loss was fresh in your mind, I would not write, lest a letter on so distressing a subject should be too painful both to you and me; and now that I seem to have

reached a proper time for doing it, the multiplicity of my literary business will hardly afford me leisure. Both you and I have this comfort when deprived of those we love,—at our time of life we have every reason to believe that the deprivation cannot be long. Our sun is setting too; and when the hour of rest arrives we shall rejoin your brother, and many whom we have tenderly loved, our forerunners into a better country. . . .—Truly yours, W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

The Lodge, May 7, 1783.

My dearest Coz— . . . I am glad I have convinced thee at last that thou art a Tory. Your friend's definition of Whig and Tory may be just for aught I know, as far as the latter are concerned; but respecting the former, I think him mistaken. There is no TRUE Whig who wishes all power in the hands of his own party. The division of it, which the lawyers call tripartite, is exactly what he desires; and he would have neither Kings, Lords, nor Commons unequally trusted, or in the smallest degree predominant. Such a Whig am I, and such Whigs are the true friends of the constitution.

Adieu! my dear, I am dead with weariness.

W. C.

To Thomas Park, Esq.

May 17, 1793.

Dear Sir—It has not been without frequent self-reproach that I have so long omitted to answer your last very kind and most obliging letter. I am by habit and inclination extremely punctual in the discharge of such arrears, and it is only through necessity, and under constraint of various indispensable engagements of a different kind, that I am become of late much otherwise.

I have never seen Chapman's translation of Homer, and will not refuse your offer of it, unless, by accepting it, I shall deprive you of a curiosity that you cannot

easily replace. The line or two which you quote from him, except that the expression 'a well-written soul' has the quaintness of his times in it, do him credit. He cannot surely be the same Chapman who wrote a poem, I think, on the battle of Hochstadt, in which, when I was a very young man, I remember to have seen the following lines:

> Think of two thousand gentlemen at least,
> And each man mounted on his capering beast.
> Into the Danube they were push'd by shoals,
> And sunk and bobb'd, and bobb'd and sunk, and sunk and bobb'd their souls.

These are lines that could not fail to impress the memory, though not altogether in the Homerican style of battle.

I am, as you say, a hermit, and probably an irreclaimable one, having a horror of London that I cannot express, nor indeed very easily account for. Neither am I much less disinclined to migration in general. I did no little violence to my love of home last summer, when I paid Mr. Hayley a visit, and in truth was principally induced to the journey by a hope that it might be useful to Mrs. Unwin; who, however, derived so little benefit from it, that I purpose for the future to avail myself of the privilege my years may reasonably claim, by compelling my younger friends to visit *me*. But even this is a point which I cannot well compass at present, both because I am too busy, and because poor Mrs. Unwin is not able to bear the fatigue of company. Should better days arrive, days of more leisure to me, and of some health to her, I shall not fail to give you notice of the change, and shall then hope for the pleasure of seeing you at Weston.

The epitaph you saw is on the tomb of the same Mr. Unwin to whom the *Tirocinium* is inscribed; the son of the lady above mentioned. By the desire of his executors I wrote a Latin one, which they approved, but it was not approved by a relation of the deceased, and therefore was not used. He objected to the mention I had made in it of his mother having devoted him to

the service of God in his infancy. She did it, however, and not in vain, as I wrote in my epitaph. Who wrote the English one I know not.

The poem called *The Slave* is not mine, nor have I ever seen it. I wrote two on the subject—one entitled *The Negro's Complaint*, and the other *The Morning Dream*. With thanks for all your kindness, and the patience you have with me.—I remain, dear Sir, sincerely yours, WM. COWPER.

To WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, May 21, 1793.

My dear Brother—You must either think me extremely idle, or extremely busy, that I have made your last very kind letter wait so very long for an answer. The truth, however, is, that I am neither; but have had time enough to have scribbled to you, had I been able to scribble at all. To explain this riddle I must give you a short account of my proceedings.

I rise at six every morning, and fag till near eleven, when I breakfast. The consequence is, that I am so exhausted as not to be able to write, when the opportunity offers. You will say—'Breakfast before you work, and then your work will not fatigue you.' I answer—'Perhaps I might, and your counsel would probably prove beneficial; but I cannot spare a moment for eating in the early part of the morning, having no other time for study.' This uneasiness of which I complain is a proof that I am somewhat stricken in years; and there is no other cause by which I can account for it, since I go early to bed, always between ten and eleven, and seldom fail to sleep well. Certain it is, ten years ago I could have done as much, and sixteen years ago did actually much more, without suffering fatigue, or any inconvenience from my labours. How insensibly old age steals on, and how often it is actually arrived before we suspect it! Accident alone,—some occurrence that suggests a comparison of our former with our present selves, affords the discovery. Well! it is

always good to be undeceived, especially on an article of such importance. . . . W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Weston, June 1, 1793.

My dearest Cousin—You will not (you say) come to us now; and you tell us not when you will. These assignations *sine die* are such shadowy things, that I can neither grasp nor get any comfort from them. Know you not, that hope is the next best thing to enjoyment? Give us then a hope, and a determinate time for that hope to fix on, and we will endeavour to be satisfied.

Johnny is gone to Cambridge, called thither to take his degree, and is much missed by me. He is such an active little fellow in my service, that he cannot be otherwise. In three weeks, however, I shall hope to have him again for a fortnight. I have had a letter from him, containing an incident which has given birth to the following.

TO A YOUNG FRIEND

ON HIS ARRIVING AT CAMBRIDGE WET, WHEN NO RAIN HAD FALLEN THERE

If Gideon's fleece, which drench'd with dew he found,
While moisture none refresh'd the herbs around,
Might fitly represent the Church endow'd
With heavenly gifts, to Heathens not allow'd:
In pledge, perhaps, of favours from on high,
Thy locks were wet, when other locks were dry,
Heaven grant us half the omen! May we see,
Not drought on others, but much dew on thee!

These are spick and span. Johnny himself has not yet seen them. . . . W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, July 7, 1793.

My dearest Hayley— . . . I am at this moment, with all the imprudence natural to poets, expending nobody knows what in embellishing my premises, or rather the premises of my neighbour Courtenay, which

is more poetical still. I have built one summer-house already, with the boards of my old study, and am building another spick and span, as they say. I have also a stone-cutter now at work, setting a bust of my dear old Grecian on a pedestal; and besides all this, I meditate still more that it is to be done in the autumn. Your project therefore is most opportune, as any project must needs be that has so direct a tendency to put money into the pocket of one so likely to want it.

> Ah brother poet! send me of your shade,
> And bid the Zephyrs hasten to my aid!
> Or, like a worm unearth'd at noon, I go
> Dispatch'd by sunshine, to the shades below.

My poor Mary is as well as the heat will allow her to be, and whether it be cold or sultry, is always affectionately mindful of you and yours. W. C.

To Thomas Park, Esq.

W. U., July 15, 1793.

Dear Sir—Within these few days I have received, by favour of Miss Knapps, your acceptable present of Chapman's translation of the *Iliad*. I know not whether the book be a rarity, but a curiosity it certainly is. I have as yet seen but little of it, enough, however, to make me wonder that any man, with so little taste for Homer, or apprehension of his manner, should think it worth while to undertake the laborious task of translating him; the hope of pecuniary advantage may perhaps account for it. His information, I fear, was not much better than his verse, for I have consulted him in one passage of some difficulty, and find him giving a sense of his own, not at all warranted by the words of Homer. Pope sometimes does this, and sometimes omits the difficult part entirely. I can boast of having done neither, though it has cost me infinite pains to exempt myself from the necessity.

I have seen a translation by Hobbes, which I prefer for its greater clumsiness. Many years have passed since I saw it, but it made me laugh immoderately.

Poetry that is not good can only make amends for that deficiency by being ridiculous; and, because the translation of Hobbes has at least this recommendation, I shall be obliged to you, should it happen to fall in your way, if you would be so kind as to procure it for me. The only edition of it I ever saw (and perhaps there never was another), was a very thick 12mo, both print and paper bad, a sort of book that would be sought in vain, perhaps, anywhere but on a stall. . . .—I remain, dear Sir, with many thanks for your kind present, sincerely yours, WM. COWPER.

To WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

Weston, July 24, 1793.

I have been vexed with myself, my dearest brother, and with everything about me, not excepting even Homer himself, that I have been obliged so long to delay an answer to your last kind letter. If I listen any longer to calls another way, I shall hardly be able to tell you how happy we are in the hope of seeing you in the autumn, before the autumn will have arrived. Thrice welcome will you and your dear boy be to us, and the longer you will afford us your company, the more welcome. I have set up the head of Homer on a famous fine pedestal, and a very majestic appearance he makes. I am now puzzled about a motto, and wish you to decide for me between two, one of which I have composed myself, a Greek one as follows:

Εἰκονα τις ταύτην; κλυτὸν ἀνέρος οὔνομ' ὄλωλεν,
οὔνομα δ' οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἄφθιτον αἶεν ἔχει.

The other is my own translation of a passage in the *Odyssey*, the original of which I have seen used as a motto to an engraved head of Homer many a time.

The present edition of the lines stands thus:

Him partially the Muse,
And dearly loved, yet gave him good and ill:
She quench'd his sight, but gave him strains divine.

Tell me by the way (if you ever had any speculations on the subject), what is it you suppose Homer to have

meant in particular, when he ascribed his blindness to the Muse; for that he speaks of himself under the name Demodocus in the eighth book, I believe is by all admitted. How could the old bard study himself blind, when books were either few, or none at all? And did he write his poems? If neither were the cause, as seems reasonable to imagine, how could he incur his blindness by such means as could be justly imputable to the Muse? Would mere thinking blind him? I want to know;

Call up some spirit from the vasty deep!

I said to my Sam[1]—'Sam, build me a shed in the garden, with anything that you can find, and make it rude and rough like one of those at Eartham.'—'Yes, sir,' says Sam, and straightway laying his own noddle, and the carpenter's noddle together, has built me a thing fit for Stow Gardens. Is not this vexatious?—I threaten to inscribe it thus;

Beware of building! I intended
Rough logs and thatch, and thus it ended.

But my Mary says I shall break Sam's heart, and the carpenter's too, and will not consent to it. Poor Mary sleeps but ill. How have you lived who cannot bear a sunbeam?

Adieu! my dearest Hayley, W. C.

To Mrs. Charlotte Smith

Weston, July 25, 1793.

My dear Madam— . . . I am a whimsical creature; when I write for the public I write of course with a desire to please, in other words to acquire fame, and I labour accordingly; but when I find that I have succeeded, feel myself alarmed, and ready to shrink from the acquisition.

This I have felt more than once, and when I saw my

[1] A very affectionate, worthy domestic, who attended his master into Sussex.—Hayley.

name at the head of your Dedication, I felt it again: but the consummate delicacy of your praise soon convinced me that I might spare my blushes, and that the demand was less upon my modesty than my gratitude. Of that be assured, dear Madam, and of the truest esteem and respect of your most obliged and affectionate, humble servant, W. C.

To the Rev. John Johnson

Aug. 2, 1793.

My dearest Johnny—The Bishop of Norwich has won my heart by his kind and liberal behaviour to you; and, if I knew him, I would tell him so.

I am glad that your auditors find your voice strong, and your utterance distinct; glad, too, that your doctrine has hitherto made you no enemies. You have a gracious Master, who, it seems, will not suffer you to see war in the beginning. It will be a wonder, however, if you do not, sooner or later, find out that sore place in every heart which can ill endure the touch of apostolic doctrine. Somebody will smart in his conscience, and you will hear of it. I say not this, my dear Johnny, to terrify, but to prepare you for that which is likely to happen, and which, troublesome as it may prove, is yet devoutly to be wished; for, in general, there is little good done by preachers till the world begins to abuse them. But understand me aright. I do not mean that you should give them unnecessary provocation, by scolding and railing at them, as some, more zealous than wise, are apt to do. That were to deserve their anger. No; there is no need of it. The self-abasing doctrines of the gospel will, of themselves, create you enemies; but remember this, for your comfort—they will also, in due time, transform them into friends, and make them love you, as if they were your own children. God give you many such; as, if you are faithful to His cause, I trust He will! . . .—Ever yours,

Wm. Cowper.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Aug. 15, 1793.

> Instead of a pound or two, spending a mint,
> Must serve me at least, I believe, with a hint,
> That building, and building, a man may be driven
> At last out of doors, and have no house to live in.

Besides, my dearest Brother, they have not only built for me what I did not want, but have ruined a notable tetrastic by doing so. I had written one which I designed for a hermitage, and it will by no means suit the fine and pompous affair which they have made instead of one. So that as a poet I am every way afflicted; made poorer than I need have been, and robbed of my verses; what case can be more deplorable?

You must not suppose me ignorant of what Flaxman has done, or that I have not seen it, or that I am not actually in possession of it, at least of the engravings which you mention. In fact, I have had them more than a fortnight. Lady Dowager Spencer, to whom I inscribed my *Odyssey*, and who was at Rome when Sir John Throckmorton was there, charged him with them as a present to me, and arriving here lately he executed his commission. Romney I doubt not is right in his judgement of them; he is an artist himself, and cannot easily be mistaken; and I take his opinion as an oracle, the rather because it coincides exactly with my own. The figures are highly classical, antique, and elegant; especially that of Penelope, who whether she wakes or sleeps must necessarily charm all beholders.

Your scheme of embellishing my *Odyssey* with these plates is a kind one, and the fruit of your benevolence to me; but Johnson, I fear, will hardly stake so much money as the cost would amount to on a work, the fate of which is at present uncertain. Nor could we adorn the *Odyssey* in this splendid manner, unless we had similar ornaments to bestow on the *Iliad*. Such I presume are not ready, and much time must elapse, even if Flaxman should accede to the plan, before he could possibly prepare them. Happy indeed should I be to

see a work of mine so nobly accompanied, but should that good fortune ever attend me, it cannot take place till the third or fourth edition shall afford the occasion. This I regret, and I regret too that you will have seen them before I can have an opportunity to show them to you. Here is sixpence for you if you will abstain from the sight of them while you are in London.

> The sculptor?—Nameless, though once dear to fame;
> But this man bears an everlasting name.[1]

So I purpose it shall stand; and on the pedestal, when you come, in that form you will find it. The added line from the *Odyssey* is charming, but the assumption of sonship to Homer seems too daring; suppose it stood thus,

ὡς δὲ παῖς ᾧ πατρὶ καὶ οὔποτε λήσομαι αὐτοῦ.

I am not sure that this would be clear of the same objection, and it departs from the text still more.

With my poor Mary's best love and our united wishes to see you here, I remain, my dearest Brother, ever yours, W. C.

To Mrs. Courtenay

Weston, Aug. 20, 1793.

My dearest Catharina is too reasonable, I know, to expect news from me, who live on the outside of the world, and know nothing that passes within it. The best news is, that though you are gone, you are not gone for ever, as once I supposed you were, and said that we should probably meet no more. Some news, however, we have; but then I conclude that you have already received it from the Doctor, and that thought almost deprives me of all courage to relate it. On the evening of the feast, Bob Archer's house affording, I suppose, the best room for that purpose, all the lads and lasses, who felt themselves disposed to dance, assembled there. Long time they danced, at least long time they did something a little like it; when at last the company

[1] A translation of Cowper's Greek verses on his bust of Homer, p. 497.

having retired, the fiddler asked Bob for a lodging. Bob replied—'that his beds were all full of his own family, but if he choose it he would show him a hay-cock, where he might sleep as sound as in any bed whatever.'—So forth they went together, and when they reached the place, the fiddler knocked down Bob, and demanded his money. But happily for Bob, though he might be knocked down, and actually was so, yet he could not possibly be robbed, having nothing. The fiddler therefore having amused himself with kicking him and beating him as he lay, as long as he saw good, left him, and has never been heard of since, nor inquired after indeed, being no doubt the last man in the world whom Bob wishes to see again. . . . W. C.

To Lady Hesketh

Aug. 29, 1793.

Your question, at what time your coming to us will be most agreeable, is a knotty one, and such as, had I the wisdom of Solomon, I should be puzzled to answer. I will therefore leave it still a question, and refer the time of your journey Westonward entirely to your own election: adding this one limitation, however, that I do not wish to see you exactly at present, on account of the unfinished state of my study, the wainscot of which still smells of paint, and which is not yet papered. But to return: as I have insinuated, thy pleasant company is the thing which I always wish, and as much at one time as at another. I believe, if I examine myself minutely, since I despair of ever having it in the height of summer, which for your sake I should desire most, the depth of the winter is the season which would be most eligible to me. For then it is, that in general I have most need of a cordial, and particularly in the month of January. I am sorry, however, that I have departed so far from my first purpose, and am answering a question which I declared myself unable to answer. Choose thy own time, secure of this, that whatever time that be, it will always to us be a welcome one.

I thank you for your pleasant extract of Miss Fanshaw's letter.

> Her pen drops eloquence as sweet
> As any muse's tongue can speak;
> Nor need a scribe, like her, regret
> Her want of Latin or of Greek.

And now, my dear, adieu! I have done more than I expected, and begin to feel myself exhausted with so much scribbling at the end of four hours' close application to study. W. C.

To the Rev. John Johnson

Weston, Sept. 6, 1793.

My dearest Johnny—To do a kind thing, and in a kind manner, is a double kindness, and no man is more addicted to both than you, or more skilful in contriving them. Your plan to surprise me agreeably succeeded to admiration. It was only the day before yesterday that, while we walked after dinner in the orchard, Mrs. Unwin between Sam and me, hearing the hall-clock, I observed a great difference between that and ours, and began immediately to lament, as I had often done, that there was not a sun-dial in all Weston to ascertain the true time for us. My complaint was long, and lasted till having turned into the grass walk, we reached the new building at the end of it; where we sat awhile and reposed ourselves. In a few minutes we returned by the way we came, when what think you was my astonishment to see what I had not seen before, though I had passed close by it, a smart sun-dial mounted on a smart stone pedestal! I assure you it seemed the effect of conjuration. I stopped short, and exclaimed,—'Why, here is a sun-dial, and upon our ground! How is this? Tell me, Sam, how came it here? Do you know anything about it?' At first I really thought (that is to say, as soon as I could think at all) that this factotum of mine, Sam Roberts, having often heard me deplore the want of one, had given orders for the supply of that want himself, without my knowledge, and was half

pleased and half offended. But he soon exculpated himself by imputing the fact to you. It was brought up to Weston (it seems) about noon: but Andrews stopped the cart at the blacksmith's, whence he went to inquire if I was gone for my walk. As it happened, I walked not till two o'clock. So there it stood waiting till I should go forth, and was introduced before my return. Fortunately too I went out at the church end of the village, and consequently saw nothing of it. How I could possibly pass it without seeing it, when it stood in the walk, I know not, but it is certain that I did. And where I shall fix it now, I know as little. It cannot stand between the two gates, the place of your choice, as I understand from Samuel, because the hay-cart must pass that way in the season. But we are now busy in winding the walk all round the orchard, and in doing so shall doubtless stumble at last upon some open spot that will suit it.

There it shall stand, while I live, a constant monument of your kindness.

I have this moment finished the twelfth book of the *Odyssey*; and I read the *Iliad* to Mrs. Unwin every evening.

The effect of this reading is, that I still spy blemishes, something at least that I can mend, so that after all, the transcript of alterations, which you and George have made, will not be a perfect one. It would be foolish to forgo an opportunity of improvement for such a reason; neither will I. It is ten o'clock, and I must breakfast. Adieu, therefore, my dear Johnny! Remember your appointment to see us in October.—Ever yours, W. C.

To the Rev John Johnson

Weston, Sept. 29, 1793.

My dearest Johnny—You have done well to leave off visiting, and being visited. Visits are insatiable devourers of time, and fit only for those who, if they did not that, would do nothing. The worst conse-

quence of such departures from common practice is to be termed a singular sort of fellow, or an odd fish; a sort of reproach that a man might be wise enough to contemn, who had not half your understanding.

I look forward with pleasure to October the eleventh, the day which I expect will be *Albo notandus lapillo*, on account of your arrival here.

Here you will meet Mr. Rose, who comes on the eighth, and brings with him Mr. Lawrence, the painter, you may guess for what purpose. Lawrence returns when he has made his copy of me, but Mr. Rose will remain perhaps as long as you will. Hayley on the contrary will come, I suppose, just in time not to see you. Him we expect on the twentieth. I trust, however, that thou will so order thy pastoral matters, as to make thy stay here as long as possible.

Lady Hesketh, in her last letter, inquires very kindly after you, asks me for your address, and purposes soon to write to you. We hope to see her in November—so that after a summer without company, we are likely to have an autumn and a winter sociable enough.

W. C.

To Mrs. Courtenay

Weston, Nov. 4, 1793.

I seldom rejoice in a day of soaking rain like this; but in this, my dearest Catharina, I do rejoice sincerely, because it affords me an opportunity of writing to you, which if fair weather had invited us into the orchard walk at the usual hour, I should not easily have found. I am a most busy man, busy to a degree that sometimes half distracts me; but if complete distraction be occasioned by having the thoughts too much and too long attached to a single point, I am in no danger of it, with such a perpetual whirl are mine whisked about from one subject to another. When two poets meet there are fine doings I can assure you. My Homer finds work for Hayley, and his *Life of Milton* work for me, so that we are neither of us one moment idle. Poor Mrs. Unwin in the meantime sits quiet in her corner, occasionally

laughing at us both, and not seldom interrupting us with some question or remark, for which she is constantly rewarded by me with a 'Hush—hold your peace.' Bless yourself, my dear Catharina, that you are not connected with a poet, especially that you have not two to deal with; ladies who have, may be bidden indeed to hold their peace, but very little peace have they. How should they in fact have any, continually enjoined as they are to be silent? . . .

I have persuaded Hayley to stay a week longer, and again my hopes revive, that he may yet have an opportunity to know my friends before he returns into Sussex. I write amidst a chaos of interruptions: Hayley on one hand spouts Greek, and on the other hand Mrs. Unwin continues talking, sometimes to us, and sometimes, because we are both too busy to attend to her, she holds a dialogue with herself.—Query, is not this a bull—and ought I not instead of dialogue to have said soliloquy?

Adieu! With our united love to all your party, and with ardent wishes to see you all at Weston, I remain, my dearest Catharina, ever yours, W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Nov. 29, 1793.

My dear Friend—I have risen while the owls are still hooting, to pursue my accustomed labours in the mine of Homer; but before I enter upon them, shall give the first moment of daylight to the purpose of thanking you for your last letter, containing many pleasant articles of intelligence, with nothing to abate the pleasantness of them, except the single circumstance that we are not likely to see you here so soon as I expected. My hope was, that the first frost would bring you, and the amiable painter with you. If, however, you are prevented by the business of your respective professions, you are well prevented, and I will endeavour to be patient. When the latter was here, he mentioned one day the subject of

Diomede's horses, driven under the axle of his chariot by the thunderbolt which fell at their feet, as a subject for his pencil. It is certainly a noble one, and therefore worthy of his study and attention. It occurred to me at the moment, but I know not what it was that made me forget it again the next moment, that the horses of Achilles flying over the foss, with Patroclus and Automedon in the chariot, would be a good companion for it. Should you happen to recollect this, when you next see him, you may submit it, if you please, to his consideration. I stumbled yesterday on another subject, which reminded me of said excellent artist, as likely to afford a fine opportunity to the expression that he could give it. It is found in the shooting-match in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*, between Meriones and Teucer. The former cuts the string with which the dove is tied to the mast-head, and sets her at liberty; the latter standing at his side, in all the eagerness of emulation, points an arrow at the mark with his right hand, while with his left he snatches the bow from his competitor. He is a fine poetical figure; but Mr. Lawrence himself must judge whether or not he promises as well for the canvas. . . . W. C.

To Samuel Rose, Esq.

Weston, Dec. 8, 1793.

My dear Friend—In my last I forgot to thank you for the box of books, containing also the pamphlets. We have read, that is to say my cousin has, who reads to us in an evening, the *History of Jonathan Wild*; and found it highly entertaining. The satire on great men is witty, and I believe perfectly just: we have no censure to pass on it, unless that we think the character of Mrs. Heartfree not well sustained,—not quite delicate in the latter part of it,—and that the constant effect of her charms upon every man who sees her has a sameness in it that is tiresome, and betrays either much carelessness, or idleness, or lack of invention. It is possible indeed that the author might intend by

this circumstance a satirical glance at novelists, whose heroines are generally all bewitching; but it is a fault that he had better have noticed in another manner, and not have exemplified in his own. . . .—Adieu!

W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Dec. 17, 1793.

O Jove! and all ye Gods! grant this my son
To prove, like me, pre-eminent in Troy;
In valour such, and firmness of command!
Be he extoll'd, when he returns from fight,
As far his sire's superior! may he slay
His enemy, bring home his gory spoils,
And may his mother's heart o'erflow with joy!

I rose this morning at six o'clock, on purpose to translate this prayer again, and to write to my dear brother. Here you have it, such as it is,—not perfectly according to my own liking, but as well as I could make it, and I think better than either yours or Lord Thurlow's. You with your six lines have made yourself stiff and ungraceful, and he with his seven has produced as good prose as heart can wish, but no poetry at all. A scrupulous attention to the letter has spoiled you both; you have neither the spirit nor the manner of Homer. A portion of both may be found I believe in my version, but not so much as I wish;—it is better, however, than the printed one. His Lordship's two first lines I cannot very well understand; he seems to me to give a sense to the original that does not belong to it. Hector, I apprehend, does not say, 'Grant that he may prove himself my son, and be eminent,' etc.;—but 'grant that this my son may prove eminent,'—which is a material difference. In the latter sense I find the simplicity of an ancient; in the former, that is to say, in the notion of a man proving himself his father's son by similar merit, the finesse and dexterity of a modern. His Lordship, too, makes the man who gives the young hero his commendation, the person who returns from battle; whereas Homer makes the young

hero himself that person; at least if Clarke is a just interpreter, which I suppose is hardly to be disputed.

If my old friend would look into my Preface, he would find a principle laid down there, which perhaps it would not be easy to invalidate, and which properly attended to would equally secure a translation from stiffness, and from wildness. The principle I mean is this—'Close, but not so close as to be servile! free, but not so free as to be licentious!' A superstitious fidelity loses the spirit, and a loose deviation the sense of the translated author: a happy moderation in either case is the only possible way of preserving both.

Thus have I disciplined you both; and now, if you please, you may both discipline me. I shall not enter my version in my book till it has undergone your strictures at least; and should you write to the noble critic again, you are welcome to submit it to his. We are three awkward fellows, indeed, if we cannot amongst us make a tolerably good translation of six lines of Homer.—Adieu! W. C.

To William Hayley, Esq.

Weston, Jan. 5, 1794.

My dear Hayley—I have waited, but waited in vain, for a propitious moment, when I might give my old friend's objections the consideration they deserve; I shall at last be forced to send a vague answer, unworthy to be sent to a person accustomed, like him, to close reasoning and abstruse discussion, for I rise after ill rest, and with a frame of mind perfectly unsuited to the occasion. I sit too at the window for light's sake, where I am so cold that my pen slips out of my fingers. First, I will give you a translation *de novo* of this untranslatable prayer. It is shaped as nearly as I could contrive to his Lordship's ideas, but I have little hope that it will satisfy him.

> Grant Jove, and all ye gods, that this my son
> Be, as myself have been, illustrious here!

> A valiant man! and let him reign in Troy;
> May all who witness his return from fight
> Hereafter, say———he far excels his sire;
> And let him bring back gory trophies, stripp'd
> From foes slain by him, to his mother's joy.

Imlac, in *Rasselas*, says—I forget to whom—'You have convinced me that it is impossible to be a poet.' In like manner I might say to his Lordship, you have convinced me that it is impossible to be a translator; to be a translator, on his terms at least, is, I am sure, impossible. On his terms I would defy Homer himself, were he alive, to translate the *Paradise Lost* into Greek. Yet Milton had Homer much in his eye when he composed that poem. Whereas Homer never thought of me or my translation. There are minutiae in every language, which transfused into another will spoil the version. Such extreme fidelity is in fact unfaithful; such close resemblance takes away all likeness. The original is elegant, easy, natural; the copy is clumsy, constrained, unnatural. To what is this owing? To the adoption of terms not congenial to your purpose, and of a context such as no man writing an original work would make use of. Homer is everything that a poet should be. A translation of Homer so made, will be everything that a translation of Homer should not be: because it will be written in no language under heaven;—it will be English, and it will be Greek; and therefore it will be neither. He is the man, whoever he be,—(I do not pretend to be that man myself); he is the man best qualified as a translator of Homer, who has drenched, and steeped, and soaked himself in the effusions of his genius, till he has imbibed their colour to the bone; and who, when he is thus dyed through and through, distinguishing between what is essentially Greek, and what may be habited in English, rejects the former, and is faithful to the latter, as far as the purposes of fine poetry will permit, and no further: this, I think, may be easily proved. Homer is everywhere remarkable either for ease, dignity, or energy of expression; for grandeur of conception, and a majestic flow of

numbers. If we copy him so closely as to make every one of these excellent properties of his absolutely unattainable, which will certainly be the effect of too close a copy, instead of translating we murder him. Therefore, after all that his Lordship has said, I still hold freedom to be an indispensable. Freedom, I mean, with respect to the expression; freedom so limited, as never to leave behind the *matter*; but at the same time indulged with a sufficient scope to secure the spirit, and as much as possible of the manner. I say as much as possible, because an English manner must differ from a Greek one, in order to be graceful, and for this there is no remedy. Can an ungraceful, awkward translation of Homer be a good one? No. But a graceful, easy, natural, faithful version of him, will not that be a good one? Yes. Allow me but this, and I insist upon it, that such a one may be produced on my principles, and can be produced on no other.

I have not had time to criticize his Lordship's other version. You know how little time I have for anything, and can tell him so.

Adieu! my dear Brother. I have now tired both you and myself; and with the love of the whole trio, remain, yours ever, W. C.

Reading his Lordship's sentiments over again, I am inclined to think that in all I have said, I have only given him back the same in other terms. He disallows both the absolute *free*, and the absolute *close*;—so do I; and, if I understand myself, have said so in my Preface. He wishes to recommend a medium, though he will not call it so; so do I: only we express it differently. What is it then we dispute about? My head is not good enough to-day to discover.

THE END

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FIELDING. Joseph Andrews. With an Introduction by *T. Rice-Oxley* (334).

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DE QUINCEY (THOMAS). Confessions of an Opium-Eater (23).
FRANKLIN (BENJAMIN). The Autobiography, edited from hi original manuscript by *John Bigelow* (250).
GIBBON (EDWARD). Autobiography. Intro. *J. B. Bury* (139).

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HOLCROFT (THOMAS). Memoirs, continued by *W. Hazlitt* (302).

HUNT (LEIGH). Autobiography. Intro. *Edmund Blunden* (329).

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¶ *Drama*

(For AESCHYLUS and ARISTOPHANES see preceding section)

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AINSWORTH (W. HARRISON). The Tower of London (162).
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BETHAM-EDWARDS (M.). The Lord of the Harvest. A Suffolk Idyll. Introduction by *Frederic Harrison* (194).
BLACKMORE (R. D.). Lorna Doone. Intro. *Sir Herbert Warren* (171).
BORROW (GEORGE). Lavengro (66). The Romany Rye (73).
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COLLINS (WILKIE). The Moonstone. Introduction by *T. S. Eliot* (316). The Woman in White (226).
COOPER (J. FENIMORE). The Last of the Mohicans (163).
DEFOE. Captain Singleton. Introduction by *T. Watts-Dunton* (82). Robinson Crusoe. Part I (17).
DICKENS. Barnaby Rudge (286). Christmas Books (307). Edwin Drood (263). Great Expectations. 6 Illustrations by *Warwick Goble* (128). Hard Times (264). Old Curiosity Shop (270). Oliver Twist. 24 Illustrations by *George Cruikshank* (8). Pickwick Papers. With 43 Illustrations by *Seymour* and '*Phiz*'. 2 volumes (120, 121). Tale of Two Cities. With 16 Illustrations by '*Phiz*'. (38).
DISRAELI (BENJAMIN). Sybil. Intro. by *Walter Sichel* (291).
ELIOT (GEORGE). Adam Bede (63). Felix Holt the Radical. Introduction by *Viola Meynell* (179). The Mill on the Floss (31). Romola. Introduction by *Viola Meynell* (178). Scenes of Clerical Life. Introduction by *Annie Matheson* (155). Silas Marner, &c. Introduction by *T. Watts-Dunton* (80).

FIELDING. Joseph Andrews. Introduction by *T. Rice-Oxley* (334).
GALT (JOHN). The Entail. Introduction by *John Ayscough* (177).
GASKELL (MRS.). Introductions by *Clement Shorter*. Cousin Phillis, and Other Tales, &c. (168). Cranford, The Cage at Cranford, and The Moorland Cottage (110). Lizzie Leigh, The Grey Woman, and Other Tales, &c. (175). Mary Barton (86). North and South (154). Right at Last, and Other Tales, &c. (203). Round the Sofa (190). Ruth (88). Sylvia's Lovers (156). Wives and Daughters (157).
GOLDSMITH. The Vicar of Wakefield (4).
HAWTHORNE. House of the Seven Gables (273). The Scarlet Letter (26). Short Stories (319).
KINGSLEY (HENRY). Geoffry Hamlyn (271). Ravenshoe (267).
LE FANU (J. S.). Uncle Silas. Intro. *Montague R. James* (306).
LESAGE. Gil Blas. Ed. *J. Fitzmaurice-Kelly*. 2 volumes (151, 152).
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MARRYAT. Mr. Midshipman Easy (160).
MEINHOLD. The Amber Witch. Intro. by *J. W. Mackail* (325).
MELVILLE (HERMAN). Moby Dick (225). Typee (274). Omoo (275). White Jacket (253).
MORIER (J. J.). Hajji Baba of Ispahan. Introduction and Notes by *C. W. Stewart*, with Map (238). Hajji Baba in England (285).
MORITZ (C. P.). Anton Reiser. Intro. *P. E. Matheson* (299).
PEACOCK (T. L.). Headlong Hall; and Nightmare Abbey (339). Misfortunes of Elphin; and Crotchet Castle. Introduction by *R. W. Chapman* (244).
SCOTT. Ivanhoe (29).
SMOLLETT. Humphry Clinker. Intro. *T. Rice-Oxley* (290).
STERNE. Tristram Shandy (40).
STEVENSON (R. L.). Treasure Island (295). Kidnapped; and Catriona (297).
SWIFT. Gulliver's Travels (20).
TAYLOR (MEADOWS). Confessions of a Thug (207).
THACKERAY. Henry Esmond (28).
TOLSTOY. Translated by *Louise* and *Aylmer Maude*. Anna Karenina. 2 volumes (210, 211). The Cossacks, &c. (208). The Kreutzer Sonata, &c. (266). Resurrection (209). Twenty-three Tales (72). War and Peace. 3 volumes (233–5).
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WATTS-DUNTON (THEODORE). Aylwin (52).

¶ *History*

BARROW (SIR JOHN). The Mutiny of the *Bounty*. Introduction by *Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge* (195).
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PRESCOTT (W. H.). The Conquest of Mexico. Introduction by *Mrs. Alec-Tweedie*. 2 volumes (197, 198).

¶ *Letters*

BURKE. Letters. Selected, with Introduction, by *H. J. Laski* (237)
CONGREVE. Letters, in Volume II. See under *Drama* (277).
COWPER. Letters. Selected, with Intro., by *E. V. Lucas* (138)
DUFFERIN (LORD). Letters from High Latitudes. Illustrated Introduction by *R. W. Macan* (158).
ENGLISH LETTERS. Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries. Selected by *M. Duckitt* and *H. Wragg* (192).
GRAY (THOMAS). Letters. Selected by *John Beresford* (283).
JOHNSON (SAMUEL). Letters. Selected, with Introduction, by *R. W. Chapman* (282).
LETTERS WRITTEN IN WAR-TIME. Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries. Selected and arranged by *H. Wragg* (202).
SOUTHEY. Letters. Selected, with an Introduction, by *M. H FitzGerald* (169).
TOLSTOY. Essays and Letters. Trans. by *L.* and *A. Maude* (46)
WHITE (GILBERT). The Natural History of Selborne (22).

¶ *Literary Criticism*

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HAZLITT (WILLIAM). Characters of Shakespeare's Plays. Introduction by *Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch* (205). Lectures on th English Comic Writers. Introduction by *R. Brimley Johnso* (124). Lectures on the English Poets (255). The Spirit of th Age. (Essays on his contemporaries) (57).
HORNE (R. H.). A New Spirit of the Age. (A successor to th preceding.) Introduction by *Walter Jerrold* (127).
JOHNSON (SAMUEL). Lives of the Poets. 2 volumes. Introduction by *Arthur Waugh* (83, 84).
SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM. (HEMINGE and CONDELL to CARLYLE) Selected and Introduced by *D. Nichol Smith* (212).

¶ *Philosophy and Science*

(For POLITICAL THEORY and RELIGION see separate headings)

AURELIUS (MARCUS). Thoughts. Translated by *John Jackson* (60).
BACON. The Advancement of Learning, and the New Atlantis. Introduction by *Professor Case* (93). Essays (24).
CARLYLE. Sartor Resartus (19).
DARWIN. The Origin of Species. With a new preface by *Major Leonard Darwin* (11).
HUME (DAVID). Essays (33).
TOLSTOY. What then must we do? Translated by *Louise* and *Aylmer Maude* (281).
WHITE (GILBERT). The Natural History of Selborne (22).
REYNOLDS (SIR JOSHUA). Discourses, &c. Intro. *A. Dobson* (149).

¶ *Poetry*

(For AESCHYLUS and ARISTOPHANES see 'Classics' on p. 5)

ARNOLD (MATTHEW). Poems, 1849–67. Introduction by *Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch* (85).
BARHAM (RICHARD). The Ingoldsby Legends (9).
BLAKE (WILLIAM). Selected Poems. Introduction by *Basil de Sélincourt* (324).
BRONTË SISTERS, THE. The Professor, by CHARLOTTE BRONTË, and Poems by CHARLOTTE, EMILY, and ANNE BRONTË. Introduction by *Theodore Watts-Dunton* (78).
BROWNING (ELIZABETH BARRETT). Poems. A Selection (176).
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KEATS. Poems (7).
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MORRIS (WILLIAM). The Defence of Guenevere, Life and Death of Jason, and other Poems (183).
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WHITTIER. Poems: A Selection (188).
WORDSWORTH. Poems: A Selection (189).

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HAWTHORNE. Short Stories (319).

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BORROW (GEORGE). The Bible in Spain (75). Wild Wales (224). Lavengro (66). Romany Rye (73).

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FIELDING (HENRY). Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, &c. Introduction and Notes by *Austin Dobson*, with an Illustration (142).

HUNT (LEIGH), The Town. Introduction and Notes by *Austin Dobson* (132).

MELVILLE (HERMAN). Typee (294). Omoo (275).

MORIER (J. J.). Hajji Baba of Ispahan. Introduction by *C. W. Stewart*, and a Map (238).

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STERNE (LAURENCE). A Sentimental Journey. With Introduction by *Virginia Woolf* (333).

INDEX OF AUTHORS, ETC.

Addison, 6.
Aeschylus, 5.
Ainsworth (W. Harrison), 8.
À Kempis (Thomas), 13.
Aksakoff (Serghei), 4.
Apocrypha, The (Revised Version), 13.
Aristophanes, 5.
Arnold (Matthew), 11.
Aurelius (Marcus), 11.
Austen (Jane), 3, 8.
Austrian Short Stories, 3, 13.
Bacon (Francis), 11.
Bagehot (Walter), 3, 12.
Barham (Richard), 11.
Barrow (Sir John), 10.
Beaumont and Fletcher, 6.
Betham-Edwards (M.), 8.
Blackmore (R. D.), 8.
Blake (William), 11.
Borrow (George), 14.
British Colonial Policy, 13.
Foreign Policy, 13.
Brontë Sisters, 8.
Brown (Dr. John), 6.
Browning (Eliz. Barrett), 11.
Browning (Robert), 6, 11.
Buckle (T. H.), 10.
Bunyan (John), 3, 8.
Burke, 12.
Burns (Robert), 11.
Byron (Lord), 11.
Carlyle (Thomas), 5, 6, 10.
Cellini (Benvenuto), 4.
Cervantes, 8.
Chaucer, 11.
Cobbold (Richard), 8.
Coleridge (S. T.), 11.
Collins (Wilkie), 8.
Colman, 6.
Congreve (William), 3, 6.
Cooper (J. Fenimore), 8.
Cowper (William), 10.
Crime and Detection, 13.
Critical Essays, 7, 10.
Czech Short Stories, 13.
Darwin (Charles), 3, 11.
Defoe (Daniel), 8.
Dekker, 6.
De Quincey (Thomas), 4.
Dickens (Charles), 8.
Disraeli (Benjamin), 8.
Dobson (Austin), 6, 11.
Don Quixote, 8.
Dryden, 5, 6.
Dufferin (Lord), 10.
Eighteenth-Century Comedies, 6.
Eliot (George), 8.
Emerson (R. W.), 7.
English Critical Essays, 7, 10.
English Essays, 4.
English Letters, 4.
English Prose, 4.
English Short Stories, 13, 14.
English Songs and Ballads, 4.
English Speeches, 13.
English Verse, 3, 4.
Fielding (Henry), 3, 14.
Francis (St.), 5.
Franklin (Benjamin), 4.
Froude (J. A.), 7.
Galt (John), 9.
Gaskell (Mrs.), 9.
Ghosts and Marvels, 14.
Gibbon (Edward), 4, 10.
Gil Blas, 9.
Goethe, 6.
Goldsmith (Oliver), 9, 11.
Gray (Thomas), 10.
Harte (Bret), 14.
Hawthorne (Nathaniel), 9.
Haydon (B. R.), 5.
Hazlitt (William), 5, 7.
Herbert (George), 11.
Herrick (Robert), 12.
Holcroft (Thomas), 5.
Holmes (Oliver Wendell), 7.

Homer, 5.
Hood (Thomas), 12.
Horne (R. H.), 7.
Hume (David), 7.
Hunt (Leigh), 3, 7.
Inchbald (Mrs.), 6.
Ingoldsby Legends, 11.
Irving (Washington), 7, 10.
Johnson (Samuel), 5, 10.
Keble (John), 12.
Kingsley (Henry), 9.
Koran, The, 3, 13.
Lamb (Charles), 7.
Landor (W. S.), 7.
Le Fanu (J. S.), 9.
Lesage, 9.
Letters written in War-time, 4.
Longfellow (H. W.), 12.
Lytton (Lord), 9.
Macaulay (T. B.), 12.
Machiavelli, 13.
Marcus Aurelius, 11.
Marlowe (Christopher), 6.
Marryat (Captain), 9.
Massinger, 6.
Meinhold (J. W.), 9.
Melville (Herman), 9.
Mill (John Stuart) 5, 13.
Milton (John), 7, 12.
Montaigne, 7.
Morier (J. J.), 9.
Moritz (C. P.), 5.
Morris (W.), 12.
Morton, 6.
Motley (J. L.), 10.
Murphy, 6.
Nekrassov, 3, 12.
Otway, 6.
Palgrave (F. T.), 4.
Pamphlets and Tracts, 4.
Peacock (T. L.), 3, 9.
Peacock (W.), 4.
Persian (From the), 14.
Poe (Edgar Allan), 14.
Polish Tales, 14.
Prescott (W. H.), 10.
Restoration Tragedies, 6.
Reynolds (Sir Joshua), 7.
Reynolds (Frederick), 6.
Rossetti (Christina), 12.
Rossetti (D. G.), 12.
Rowe, 6.
Ruskin (John), 7.
Russian Short Stories, 14.
Scott (Sir W.), 5, 9, 12.
Shakespeare, 6.
Shakespeare's Contemporaries, 6.
Shakespearian Criticism, 10.
Sheridan (R. B.), 6.
Smith (Adam), 13.
Smith (Alexander), 7.
Smith (J. T.), 3, 5.
Smollett (T.), 8, 9.
Sophocles, 5.
Southerne, 6.
Southey (Robert), 10.
South Seas, Short Stories of 3, 14.
Spanish Short Stories, 3, 14.
Sterne (Laurence), 3, 8, 9.
Stevenson (R. L.), 8, 9.
Swift (Jonathan), 9.
Taylor (Meadows), 9.
Tennyson (Lord), 12.
Thackeray (W. M.), 8, 9.
Thoreau (H. D.), 8.
Three Dervishes, The, 14.
Tolstoy, 3, 6, 8, 9, 14.
Tracts and Pamphlets, 4.
Trelawny (E. J.), 5.
Trollope (Anthony), 3, 5, 9.
Virgil, 5.
Walton (Izaak), 5.
Watts-Dunton (Theodore), 9.
Webster, 6.
Wells (Charles), 12.
Wells (H. G.), 4.
White (Gilbert), 8.
Whitman (Walt), 12.
Whittier (J. G.), 12.
Wordsworth (William), 12

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